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MEMORIAL

OF

A QUARTER-CENTURY'S PASTORATE.

A SERMON

Preached on the Sabbaths, Jan. 3d and 17th, 1869,

IN THE

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, NATCHEZ, MISS.

BY

REV. JOSEPH B. STRATTON, D.D.

PUBLISHED FOR THE USE OF THE CONGREGATION.

PHILADELPHIA:
J. B. LIPPINCOTT & CO.
1869.

QUARTER-CENTURY SERMON.

PART FIRST.

"Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery."—I. Tim. iv. 14.

The word "gift," employed by the apostle here, is a comprehensive term, meaning the office of a Christian minister, which it was Timothy's privilege to exercise, and the qualifications for that office which had been conferred upon him by the providence and Spirit of God. The word could with propriety be applied still to any Christian minister; although in Timothy's case his qualifications may have included some of those supernatural powers which we know were conferred in the apostolic age upon officers and even private members of the Church,—which no Christian minister now is authorized to claim.

The "gift," in virtue of which Timothy was constituted a Christian minister, is said to have been given to him "by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the

presbytery." The reference to "prophecy," as connected with his induction into his office, is most naturally explained by supposing it to mean some intimations made, at some unknown period, by parties gifted with the power of prophesying or speaking for God, that it was the will of God that Timothy should adopt as his calling the work of the ministry. An instance of such intimations we find in the thirteenth chapter of Acts, where we read—as certain persons in Antioch, called "prophets and teachers," were ministering to the Lord, and fasting, the Holy Ghost said,—doubtless to them and through them,—"Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them." Concurrently with this "prophecy" which designated him to his office, we are told Timothy's gift was "given him with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery." The term "presbytery," here, means a body of men bearing the office of presbyters,—or elders, as the word is generally rendered in our translation. No other meaning can be given to it without landing us in grammatical or logical absurdity. To preclude all question, however, as to its meaning, we find it occurring in two other places in the New Testament,—once in Luke xxii. 66, where it is said, "the elders of the people" (in the original, "the presbytery of the people") "came together" in council; and again in Acts xxii. 5, where it is said by Paul, in his defense before the populace of Jerusalem, "the high-priest, and all the estate of the elders" (in the original, "all the presbytery"), "bear me witness;"—places where no one ever dreamed, or

could dream, that it meant anything else than a body of men bearing the office of presbyters, or elders.

Now, who or what sort of men these presbyters were, with the imposition of whose hands Timothy was invested with his office, a glance at the allusions to be found in the book of Acts and the Epistles will inform us. We find Paul and Barnabas ordaining them in the churches of Asia Minor, which they had gathered during that mission unto which the Holy Ghost had required them to be "separated;"—we find them in the church at Jerusalem;—we find them in the church at Ephesus;—we find them, in fact, everywhere where the religion of Christ appears embodying itself in an organized community of believers. They constitute, as plainly as history can teach it, the regular, the local, the stationary ruling and teaching estate in the corporation of the Church. Their title was transferred from the usage of the Old Testament Church,—was venerable for its antiquity, and sanctioned by a Divine warrant. Their functions embrace all the forms of service attached in the Scriptures to the Christian ministry. They are called very frequently the "overseers" or "bishops" of the Church of God,—a name expressing in its import the whole circle of acts by which superintendence, government, or nurture could be exercised or administered in the Church. That this is so,—that the term overseer or bishop, in the language of the New Testament, is convertible with presbyter,—any one can satisfy himself by looking at the twenty-eighth verse of Acts xx., where

Paul says to the Ephesian elders convened by him at Miletus, "Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers" (or, as the word is in the original, "bishops"),—or by looking at Tit. i. 5, 6, and 7, where, after telling Titus to ordain elders in Crete, provided he could find any who were "blameless," the same apostle adds, "for a bishop must be blameless;" evidently using the words elder and bishop as interchangeable. Agreeably with these cases, in every instance in the New Testament where the word bishop occurs, the word presbyter or elder may be, and ought to be, allowed as a substitute; and every function which is ascribed to the office of bishop may be, and ought to be, ascribed to that of presbyter or elder.

This office, I remark now, was manifestly, according to the New Testament, the one which was to perpetuate the ruling and teaching estate in the Church. The apostolic college, after the addition of Matthias and Paul to it, consisted of thirteen persons. While they lived, they were presbyters, or bishops,—that is, officers clothed with the power of ruling and teaching,—in common with those who bore, in a technical sense, these titles. Hence we find Peter saying, "The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder;" and John, in two of his epistles, styling himself "the elder." But the apostles were more than this. They were charged with functions which, in the nature of the case, could not be shared with others, and could not be trans-

ferred to other hands. They must, for instance, be able to say that their commission had come to them directly from the Lord; that they had had a personal acquaintance with Him; and that they were authorized to affirm His resurrection and His present existence from their own observation. Thus, Paul was accustomed to make good his claim to the apostleship by the bold challenge, "Have not I seen the Lord?" They must, furthermore, be inspired men,—capable of completing the faith of the Church by expounding the revelations which Christ had made, and by adding to these such as the Holy Ghost saw fit yet to make. They must stand where the prophet of the Old Dispensation stood, and speak to the minds and consciences of men with the authority of God. This they affirm, again and again, that they do do. But no class of persons but they could do it. The apostles, indubitably, had a place to fill, peculiar to themselves; and it is a solecism to speak of their having successors in the literal sense of the term. They passed away when their work was done, and the only successors they left were the ruling and teaching estate of the presbyters. This survived as a permanent order of officers in the Church, and as the main element in securing its organic perpetuity.

By a body of these presbyters, and formally "with the laying on of their hands," Timothy was put in charge with his gift as a Christian minister. It is said, indeed, in the Second Epistle addressed to him by Paul (ch. 1, v. 6), "I put thee in remembrance that thou stir

up the gift of God which is in thee, by the putting on of my hands." But, whatever this may mean, it is certain it cannot contradict the other declaration. Paul's hands must still have been put upon Timothy in such a way as should leave the laying on of the hands of the presbytery possessed of its full force and effect, as the instrumentality by which he received his gift. And this will be the case if we suppose—either that Paul refers here to some imposition of hands, performed by him, upon Timothy, in order to communicate to him those extraordinary gifts of the Holy Spirit which we know were, in the primitive Church, often in that way conferred upon believers; or that Paul, being an elder as well as an apostle, like Peter and John, had taken part with the presbytery in ordaining Timothy to the ministry. Either of these suppositions is probable, and makes the saying, that Timothy's gift was communicated by the putting on of Paul's hands, consistent with the other saying, that it was communicated by the laying on of the hands of the presbytery; while, if we suppose that it was the putting on of Paul's hands alone which communicated the gift, we shall make completely void the declaration that it was with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery that he received it. It is altogether inadmissible, therefore, to suppose that Timothy was ordained by Paul alone; it is perfectly consistent to suppose that he was ordained by the presbytery.

And now, being ordained so, he became a presbyter, —a bishop,—and was capable of joining in communi-

cating the gift he had received to others. Accordingly, the apostle enjoins him, in his Second Epistle, "The things that thou hast heard of me, among many witnesses,"—perhaps the very things addressed to him, in the presence of the presbytery, on the occasion of his ordination,—"the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also;" and in another place, he admonishes him to "lay hands suddenly," or hastily, "upon no man." This power of perpetuating the ministry by the ordination of faithful men, lay in the hands of the presbytery after the apostles were gone, as it had lain in their hands while they were living, and lay in their hands as a function common to them all. For we read of no distinction among presbyters in the New Testament. Up to the time when the New Testament history closes, we have every reason to conclude that the record in ordinary cases of any other minister's ordination would have been in the same form as that of Timothy's, "with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery;" and we have no reason to conclude that it would have been in any other form. And ecclesiastical history for the first two centuries gives us no reason to conclude that the record of such an event within that period would have been in any other form. After that period, indeed, we find a change. The parity of presbyters was invaded; the monarchical principle, borrowed from the familiar and imposing constitutions of State government, was engrafted upon the polity of the Church; and an order of officers claiming

to be superior to the presbyter, and holding in their hands the sole right to ordain, began to appear. This change, in the course of ages, culminated in the Primacy of the Bishop of Rome, as the head of the universal Church; and with the exception of such small bodies of Christians as the Waldenses and Albigenses, who seem never to have acknowledged the Bishop of Rome, and never to have abandoned the theory of the parity of presbyters and the right of presbytery to ordain,—with this exception, the ordaining power was conceded to be a function of that order of which the Bishop of Rome claimed to be chief.

The Reformation in the sixteenth century was an effort, on the part of that portion of the Church which participated in it, to throw off the excrescences of various sorts which had accumulated upon its faith and practice, and recover the position and organic structure indicated for it in the Scriptures. It was a reformation, because it undertook to restore to the Church the form prescribed for it in the word of God. In this movement, one of the first steps was to assert the supremacy of presbyters, as the only order of ministers succeeding to the apostles, and to reinvest them with their original right to practice ordination. Those of the Reformers who were ecclesiastics had received ordination in the Church which they sought to reform, from the hands of men who, whatever they claimed to be more than presbyters which they were not, were nevertheless presbyters, and so formally could ordain. Em-

powered by this ordination, they in their turn, as presbyters, ordained others; and so the succession, taking again the channel marked out for it in the New Testament, has flowed on from the Reformed Churches of the Continent of Europe, which, as they ceased to be Papal, invariably became Presbyterian, to Scotland and England, and thence to these American shores. The historical current by which any man receiving ordination to the Christian ministry, by a lawful presbytery, may trace the conveyance of his gift from apostolic times, can thus unequivocally and consistently be shown; and he has a right to assume that his gift has been conveyed to him by that current, without being required to perform the natural impossibility of marking, as on a map, every inch and every turn of its channel. He has a right to say, when taunted with the question, "Where was your Church before the time of Luther?" or other similar ones, "It was in the time of the apostles;"—"it was in the days which the Scripture history covers,—the oldest and the most authentic of the periods of Church history;"—"it was in the plan of His kingdom, which God in the beginning drew by the finger of His Spirit on the pages of His word." He has a right to say, when charged with exercising an unauthorized ministry, "I stand on the same ground with Timothy; on ground farther back and higher up than that defined by tradition, or the writings of the Fathers; on ground where Paul, in all his apostolic authority and infallibility, appears indorsing the act of the presbytery who by the

imposition of their hands invested his disciple with the ministerial office."

I shall perhaps be excused for this exposition, if any excuse is necessary, when I remark that twenty-five years ago, almost to a day, I was, by an agency and authority of precisely the species I have been describing, ordained in this house to the office of the gospel ministry. The "gift" that is in me, as an officer in the Church of God, was then given me by "prophecy," or what I regarded as intimations of the Divine will, and "with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery." I was, of course, satisfied then that the commission with which I was charged was an authentic one. The studies, the reflections, and the observations of subsequent years have only confirmed me in this conviction. The grounds upon which that commission claimed to be authentic have been canvassed, sifted, attacked, and defended innumerable times, and the result of all these processes has been, to my mind at least, to make more manifest the exact coincidence of these grounds with the facts, the precedents, and the teachings of Scripture. And, with the Scripture as my warrant, I have felt that I was in possession of the surest, the most complete, and the most ancient title to my office which was attainable in the case. I have felt, in accepting the gift of the ministry through the channel by which it was conveyed to me, that I was not taking that honor unto myself, but receiving a call from God to it, as was Aaron. And in this confidence I have continued in all good conscience, as a genuine pres-

byter in the Church, to bear authoritative testimony to the truths of the gospel, to exercise rule in the house of God, to administer the sacraments, to take part in the councils of the Church, and to join in the laying on of hands upon others who were to be initiated into the ministry, from the day of my ordination till now. In the due appreciation of the "gift" conferred upon me, I have not failed; in the proper exercise of it, I am only too conscious of being guilty in many ways of that "neglect" against which the apostle cautions Timothy.

As will have been observed from the remarks just made, my introduction to this church was signalized not merely by an act of installation by which I was set over it as its pastor, but by an act of ordination by which I was inducted into the ministerial office. When I came to this congregation, in the latter part of May, 1843, I came simply as a licentiate of the Presbytery of Philadelphia, under the care of which body, from the fact that my residence for a number of years prior to my adoption of the ministry as my profession had lain within its bounds, I had placed myself. A few months before the period fixed for the closing of my studies at the Theological Seminary at Princeton, the school in which I received my training, and which was presided over, at the time, by such masters in divinity as Drs. Archibald Alexander, Samuel Miller, Charles Hodge, and Joseph Addison Alexander, I had been authorized by Presbytery to preach as opportunity offered, according to that wise provision of our Church by which "the brethren" of the

household of faith are invoked to form and pronounce their judgment in aid of that of the Presbytery, as to the possession by a candidate of those gifts which indicate that he has been called of God to the ministry. From the halls of this school, after having preached, I think, only on four or five occasions, I proceeded directly to this city, in pursuance of an invitation some time previously addressed to me by the Session of this church. I came less a stripling in years than in appearance; but a veritable stripling in the arts of spiritual championship, having on such armor as I had been able to acquire during a course of three years' study, but all unpracticed in the use of that armor. I came because the junctures of Providence had seemed to open the path before me, and without a wish or purpose in my mind except to learn the issue to which that path, in the ordering of Providence, was to lead me. That issue was indicated by the warm-hearted welcome extended to me, and the favorable temper in which my labors were received by the people, and chiefly by the presentation to me, on the 12th day of June, less than four weeks after my arrival, of a unanimous call to become their pastor. To a call presented under such circumstances, there seemed to be only one response to be given; and, accordingly, in the course of the summer, from my home in New Jersey, whither I had returned in July, I announced to the congregation my acceptance of it. It was not until November of that year, 1843, that I was able to assume the charge of the post so assigned me. In that month I

began the residence in Natchez, which has continued ever since. The Presbytery of Mississippi, to which this church belonged, convened in this city in the latter part of December, and, after sustaining my qualifications for the pastoral office, by the various trials prescribed in our Form of Government, proceeded, on Sabbath the 31st, to administer the rite of ordination. On that occasion, by appointment of the Presbytery, the Rev. Jeremiah Chamberlain, D.D., President of Oakland College, preached an appropriate sermon from Heb. xiii. 17: "For they watch for your souls, as they that must give account;" and the Rev. William Montgomery, the venerable patriarch of the Presbytery, made the ordaining prayer, and took the lead in the imposition of hands. The installation service followed immediately; and the close of these solemnities found me charged with that double "gift," of the Christian ministry and the pastorship of this church, which, under God's peculiar blessing, I have been permitted to exercise for the succeeding twenty-five years.

These personal reminiscences are related with some diffidence; but this is my apology for them, that the history of the church hangs necessarily very much upon the thread of my own history, and with very many of my hearers the facts I am relating belong to a period of which they can have no recollection, and may serve, by ministering to their intelligence, to quicken also their interest in the church of their fathers.

At the time of my coming to Natchez, the condition of

the city was not unlike that in which we find it at the present moment. It was just recovering from the effects of a wide-spread and disastrous commercial collapse, by which its enterprise had been paralyzed and its wealth almost annihilated. This crisis, as it is common to call such phenomena, occurred during the years 1837 and 1838, and left the country in a state of virtual bankruptcy. In close succession upon this financial convulsion, the memorable tornado of May 7, 1840, had visited the city and laid it to a great extent in ruins. Impoverished by the destruction of property, embarrassed by debts of almost fabulous magnitude, bewildered by the general failure of public and private securities, and immersed in litigation, the community found itself thrown, with a suddenness which has been hardly exceeded in the strange experiences of recent times, from a plethora of prosperity into an extreme of exhaustion. As a consequence, the tide of population and business, for a series of years, continued to ebb away from Natchez. This depletion would doubtless have been fatal, had it not been that the intrinsic and inalienable resources of the country are such as enable its inhabitants almost to command wealth, and such as endow them with a recuperative power which no conceivable check can entirely subvert. It was not fatal, but in time yielded to the effects of a patient development and husbanding of these resources; and I have been allowed since to see, in the homes of this city and neighborhood, as marked an exhibition of general comfort and opulence as perhaps

the world could show. The heavy pressure of adversity, however, was here when I began my ministry, and the church, like every other interest, felt its blight. One of the evidences of this was that, although considerable accessions were made to its membership every year, for a long time no increase of its numerical force appeared, by reason of the frequent dismissions granted to persons removing to other places of residence.

The Presbyterian Church at Natchez, at the time I became its pastor, had been in existence twenty-six years,—its organization having been practically effected in 1817, by the enrollment of eight persons as members. The Rev. Daniel Smith, a clergyman from New England, who had been laboring as a domestic missionary in the community for more than a year, was invited to minister to it as a stated supply; and John Henderson, Jos. Forman, Richard Pearce, and Wm. B. Noyes were ordained as its bench of ruling elders. To this body Samuel S. Spencer was added in 1818. Steps had been taken as early as 1810 for the erection of a Presbyterian house of worship; and in 1812 the corner-stone of the building was laid. It was a brick structure, located on the spot where our present church stands. It was dedicated in February, 1815. The engagement with the Rev. Mr. Smith having terminated in 1819, the Rev. William Weir, a native of Ireland, was elected pastor, and on the 31st of March, 1820, was installed by the Mississippi Presbytery. This gentleman, therefore, was the first

regular pastor of this church. He is remembered by some few of our aged citizens, and is spoken of as a man of learning, of great purity of character, and eminently zealous in his work. His period of labor, however, was a short one, his death having occurred on the 25th of November, 1822. The square marble tomb which marks the spot of his sepulture may still be found in a neglected lot which belongs to the church in our city cemetery.

The second pastor of the church was the Rev. George Potts, who, like myself, first visited Natchez as a licentiate of the Presbytery of Philadelphia. Having been subsequently ordained by that Presbytery, he was installed pastor by the Presbytery of Mississippi in December, 1823. The number of communicants at this time was forty-nine. The first donations reported to have been made by this congregation were in the year 1825, and consisted of twenty dollars to the "Missionary Fund," and thirty dollars to the "Education Society." In the beginning of 1825, Samuel Postlethwaite was ordained as a ruling elder,—a man distinguished for his urbanity as a gentleman and for his integrity as a Christian, and a fine type of that band of merchants who in the earlier times of Natchez made their class noble. In 1828, the church-edifice originally erected being found inconvenient, the trustees resolved to erect a new one, which work was in the course of the next two years successfully effected. This second building was the original of the one we now occupy, and was dedicated on the

first Sabbath of January, 1830, just thirty-nine years ago. The pastorate of Mr. Potts terminated in November, 1835, having continued thirteen years. His removal from Natchez was occasioned by his acceptance of a call from the Duane Street Church in the city of New York. He left a communion-list of one hundred and thirty-five persons. During his incumbency another addition had been made to the ruling eldership, in the person of Dr. Andrew Macrery.

The successor of Mr. Potts was the Rev. Samuel G. Winchester, a native of Baltimore, and previously pastor of a church in Philadelphia. His installation took place on the 24th day of December, 1837. The bench of elders having been reduced by deaths and removals to two members,—the venerable John Henderson and Dr. Macrery,—the congregation elected to that office Thomas Henderson, William Pearce, and Franklin Beaumont, who were ordained on the 25th of February, 1838. In the year following, the church-building was repaired, and its means of accommodation enlarged by the introduction of the galleries which are at present standing. About the same time the very neat and commodious parsonage belonging to the church was purchased for the use of the pastor. Mr. Winchester's labors were brought to a close unexpectedly by his death, in August, 1841, while he was absent at the North, whither he had gone as Commissioner to the General Assembly, which met that year in Philadelphia. It was my privilege, on one occasion, to hear him preach in his former church in

Spruce Street, in that city, during the sessions of the Assembly. I had no personal acquaintance with him, but had gone to hear him, attracted merely by his reputation. I listened, thus, to the tones of his voice after they had uttered their last counsels and exhortations in the ear of his flock in Natchez. How strange the providence which had ordered it that the unknown student who was listening that day to the eloquent preacher, dreaming far more of being a missionary to China than the successor of him to whom he was listening, should be that successor! During Mr. Winchester's ministry the number of communicants increased to two hundred and three; and among the contributions given by the church in 1838, I find one for Foreign Missions amounting to $2508, and another for Domestic Missions amounting to $2054.

In assuming the charge intrusted to me as the fourth regular pastor of this church, I was assuming, I need hardly say, to one in my circumstances, a work of no little magnitude. Indeed, when I recall the amount of labor of mind and spirit and body that I was compelled to undergo during the first ten years of my ministry, I am amazed that I am here to-day to refer to it. I do not wish to magnify the hardships of my office with any pathetic intent, but I do wish it were in my power to give some adequate impression of the trials and toils comprehended in such a position as I have filled in this community, in order to blunt the edge of those complaints of shortcomings in duty which are frequently directed

against the clerical profession, and which I have no reason to suppose I have escaped.

The claims of the pulpit must ever present themselves to the young minister as most formidable in their dimensions. And they ought to do so. For an ambassador of Christ to treat his message with levity is sadly out of harmony with his demand that his hearers should hear it as though "God did beseech" them by him. These claims necessarily involve an application of mind, in the way of research and reflection, of the severest kind. And then they are incessant and inexorable in their exactions. As soon as one effort is concluded, another must be prepared for. "The inevitable hour" when the congregation must have its lecture or discourse, and must have it whether the preacher be in frame or out of frame, is always impending over him. Entertaining the views which I held of obligation on this subject, and haunted always, perhaps criminally, certainly painfully, with a feeling of self-distrust, the work of preparing for the pulpit, with me, has been an arduous one. I have been accustomed, as you are aware, in my Sabbath preaching, to make a large use of the pen. Sometimes in my earlier ministry I felt constrained to depend upon this altogether. The draft upon a clergyman's time, created by this practice, I am coming more and more to think, should be avoided by such training as may qualify him to preach without the labor of literal composition. Pursuing the plan which I have adopted, and which it is not easy now to depart from, I have written out completely at

least six hundred discourses of different kinds during the twenty-five years of my pastorate in this place.

A minister, again, at a central point like this, will find his duties as a presbyter extending beyond the circle of his own charge. And as one result of this he will have a large amount of correspondence thrown upon his hands. I have found that one day in each week, and often two, were required for this species of work.

Then the maintaining of an intercourse with the individuals and families of his flock, is a part of his duty which allows a pastor no rest. Although he may know that his rule here, as in all things, is "to study to show himself approved unto God," he knows, too, that his people expect him to show himself approved unto them. He may know, as is the case in a charge as extensive as this, that it is impossible to satisfy the wishes of his people without sacrificing every other department of his work; but the reflection that he is not satisfying them will be in his mind like a goad, driving him forward, and yet always tormenting him with the consciousness of falling behind the required measure of performance.

Then the casual services which are demanded of him in connection with the wants, the troubles, and the afflictions of the community in which he ministers—services which are indefinitely various, which may spring upon him at the most inopportune moment, and which are sometimes inconsiderately imposed — constitute a tax upon time, upon thought, and often upon feeling, of the most exhaustive nature.

Then the teacher who is constantly teaching, must seek to be constantly taught. He must keep himself informed, that he may inform others. He needs the opportunity and the freedom of mind required for study; not merely such as shall furnish him for an exercise, but such as shall make him generally intelligent.

And then, lastly, he has the same infirmities, the same inaptitudes and indispositions, clogging his movements, which other men feel, and under which they usually indulge themselves with a cessation from labor; and he has the same kind and the same measure of household responsibilities claiming his attention and burdening his mind, which other men, encompassed with domestic ties, have.

Amid a set of obligations, exactions, and obstructions like this, I was called to make my way when I took charge of the pastorate of this congregation. And I was called to make it too, I may add, very much alone; for, from the sparseness of our churches in this region, I have enjoyed to a very limited extent the benefit of intercourse with ministerial brethren. It ought not to be surprising if in making that way I have often erred, often been chargeable with that "neglect" which the apostle forbids in his exhortation to Timothy; and for all such delinquencies, in view of the statements just made, I think I have not been unreasonable in expecting at the hands of my flock that kind toleration which I can say they have generally been disposed to extend to them.

I ought not to overlook to-day the remarkable good-

ness of God, in the almost uninterrupted enjoyment of health which has been vouchsafed to me during my long ministry in this place. As nearly as I can remember, I have been prevented by sickness from performing the regular duties of the Sabbath—if I except the greater part of the year 1859, when, from general exhaustion terminating in a slight organic derangement, I was obliged to suspend public speaking—but three times during twenty-five years. I have been exposed within that period to five epidemic seasons, some of them marked by great malignity in the prevailing disease; but, though in daily and almost hourly contact with the pestilence, it has not been permitted to touch me.

I cannot, and I ought not to, forget, however, as my thoughts retrace the path along which I have been led, that if goodness and mercy have followed me in this respect, I have not failed, in others, to experience the discipline of sorrow. My early years in Natchez were darkened by the heaviest affliction which ever throws its shadow on the heart of man. When we begin to count off our quarter-centuries, it will seem to most of us, I imagine, that we have passed through a series of different worlds in the course of our living. In one of those distant worlds, a world lit once with the sunshine of youthful romance, there hangs a cloud, fixed immovably in the dim horizon. Under the influence of it, consciously or unconsciously, probably, I have passed through the whole of my subsequent ministerial life. Perhaps, as I was to stand by so many sorrowing ones

and help them to drink their bitter cups, it was not without a purpose that I was made to drink such a cup first,—that I was made to taste a sorrow which goes down to the bottom of all human sorrows. If, as has so often happened, I have had to say to the soul adrift on the wild ocean of grief, "Jesus is near; and Jesus can help you," it is because on such an ocean I have myself seen Him present and realized the sustaining power of His grace. And if, to the heart asking, in the desolation which the removal of its dearest object has wrought, "What have I now to live for?" I could hold up the claims of Jesus, and give the counsel, "To me to live is Christ," and not feel that I was mocking the anguish of the bewildered questioner, it was because I had myself received that counsel from the lips of dying love, and had found that life still had a value in it, so long as it could be consecrated to Christ.

At the commencement of my pastorship the number of communicants on the roll of the church was two hundred and six. Since that time there have been added five hundred and thirty-two, of whom four hundred and three were admitted upon profession of their faith. Within the same period one hundred and eleven have died, and three hundred and twenty-eight have been dismissed to other churches or have been stricken from the roll. The drain upon the membership each year, by deaths and dismissions, has almost kept pace with the accessions; so that, although there has been a constant growth in the church, the number of communicants at

present recognized is only two hundred and ninety-one. The largest number on the roll at any one time within the period of my ministry was three hundred and five. The largest number of additions made in any one year was made in 1858, when an unusual interest in religion affected this community in common with most of the country, and we had the pleasure of receiving into the church ninety-four new members, most of them upon profession of their faith. The Sabbath in that year, June 6, on which the Session introduced to you, in one body, sixty-nine persons who had been adopted into your Christian family, and the rite of baptism was administered to twenty of them, will doubtless be recalled by most of you as a day memorable in your history. It was a day which brought to many of your homes a "great joy," like that which prevailed in the city of Samaria, and a demonstration, coupled with that joy, that the same Spirit which wrought the miracle of Pentecost was still present and still active in the world, and could still be depended on to bless the preaching of the gospel and to answer the prayers of the Church.

The statement just made, that during the past twenty-five years only four hundred and three persons, under my ministry, have been found willing openly to avow themselves as believers in Christ, is one which at first view is humiliating and disheartening. It seems a small ingathering to reward the laborer who has in one field borne the burden and the heat of so long a day. Still, the eye of the Saviour rested, apparently, not so much

upon masses as upon single souls; and His ministers, where they cannot see crowds won to the obedience of the faith, must magnify the worth of the single souls whom they may have aided to bring to Christ, and must feel, like the angels, that there is occasion for joy in the fact that even one sinner repenteth. I confess, however, that were it not for the assurance I have, that my influence has operated for good in ways that I have not known and perhaps ought not to know, and will continue to operate after I have passed from my field of labor, I should be oppressed with a profound sadness as I survey the results of my ministry to-day.

With a few items more I will close this first part of my sketch of a quarter-century's pastorship.

I have baptized six hundred persons,—one hundred and two adults and four hundred and ninety-eight infants. I have solemnized the rites of matrimony two hundred and fifty times; and in several of these instances the parties have been the children of those whom I had previously united in marriage. I have conducted, or assisted in conducting, five hundred and fifteen funerals. In the performance of this last most trying part of a minister's duty I have been called to enter, as it seems to me, most of the homes of this city and the vicinity for miles in every direction; and I have established a sad link of association between my office and the family history of most of those among whom I live. I have followed to their graves a large number of those who were the fathers and mothers of the generation now before me;

and were I to repeat their names the list would include almost every one who has helped to make the society of Natchez as reputable and its traditions as honorable as they confessedly are. In it would be found nine of my ministerial brethren; four of the Methodist Church, one of whom was the venerated Carson, so long the St. John of our city; one of the Episcopal Church,—the gifted Chadburne, who fell a victim to the yellow fever of 1853, whom I had visited and prayed with in his sick-room, and at whose burial I read the service of his Church; and four of my own Church, one of whom was the beloved spiritual father by the putting on of whose hands I had been inducted into my office,—Dr. Chamberlain, whose tragical death in September, 1851, will be remembered by many of you, and in memory of whom I preached a sermon at the request of the Trustees of the College over which he presided; and another was the Rev. Benjamin H. Williams, for years, as the pastor of the Pine Ridge Church, my nearest neighbor, and always my dearest friend, who died in Vicksburg (where he had become pastor of the Presbyterian Church) of the epidemic of 1855, and in testimony of whose worth I also, at the request of his congregation, pronounced a funeral discourse.

In reviewing the records which I have preserved of these solemn ceremonials, and passing from them, by a natural transition, to the numerous death-chambers I have had to visit, I seem almost to have dropped the tie of identity with the living present and to be encompassed with the population of a past world,—a spec-

tral population, whose feet I had helped to guide to the borders of that spirit-land into which they were, one by one, passing. And I can aver to you, my friends, with all honesty, and with the intensest emphasis, that the testimony which I derive from my converse with this silent and shadowy throng is all in favor of that religion which for twenty-five years I have been engaged in recommending to you.

Is it argued by the preacher that this life is too insecure, too unsubstantial, to be pursued as the portion of the soul? My reminiscences tell me that the argument is good. I have seen the fact affirmed most abundantly demonstrated. I have observed that death is ever at hand to defeat the best-laid schemes and blast the most rational hopes of man. I have seen him again and again selecting as his victims the very ones who, we would have said, ought not to die, and could not die. I have seen him cut down with his remorseless scythe the fairy child, the maiden in the pride of her beauty, the minister of God in the midst of his usefulness, the mother with her little flock living upon her love, and the father holding up his dependent household by his providence and care. I have seen, in one of our epidemic summers, a young mechanic, whose energy and probity had opened for him, as he supposed, a sure avenue to wealth, and the bride whom he had brought, in her ruddy girlhood, a few months before, to his neat little home, both almost at the same hour prostrated by the fever, torn from one another and from all earthly objects by the

stupor in which he was wrapped and the delirium which had seized upon her, and reunited only when death came, in less than two days, and again almost at the same hour, to bear them both to the presence of God,—and in one burial a few of us laid them, side by side, in the same grave. That incident, and hundreds of others, of the same import, though less striking in their details, have taught me that the man who makes the world his trust is the grandest madman who ever built a costly house upon a foundation of sand.

Is it argued by the preacher that the way of the transgressor is hard? I have seen this verified, when I have seen the drunkard, after throwing away talents which might have made him reputable, and wrecking the hearts of those who loved him, going to his early grave; when I have seen the man of violence groaning in remorse on his bloody death-bed; when I have seen the criminal shuddering in his cell, in terror of the gallows to which his crimes had brought him; and when I have seen—for I have seen this too—the tenant of the house of shame closing her life of vice in the agonies of despair. When I have seen these, and a hundred other spectacles, implying the same doctrine, though less marked in form, I have been satisfied that the wages of sin, from first to last, is death.

And is it argued by the preacher that godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come? A long procession of beautiful characters, graced with the piety of the

gospel, and radiant habitually with the peace which trust in Jesus and love to God had inspired, rises before me. And a long series of scenes, in which these characters, after demonstrating the genuineness of their faith by their patience in suffering, had calmly, joyfully fallen asleep in the arms of their Saviour, to waken in His likeness and in His presence in heaven, comes to light on the pages of my memory; and when I think of them, I am sure the apostle was right when he called Christ and His salvation God's "unspeakable gift;" when he described the faith of the believer as a "precious" faith; and when he professed himself willing to "count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord."

And it is not, I ask you to notice, a testimony furnished merely by the exercises and phenomena which attend the actual moments of death, to which I thus refer,—for I know only too well that such exercises may be specious and such phenomena illusory; but I hold up that testimony before you, as founded upon this broad induction, this absolute fact,—that I have never stood by a death-bed, in the whole course of my twenty-five years' ministry, which did not make it unequivocally evident that the party dying had made an infinite mistake IF HE HAD NOT LIVED—A CHRISTIAN.

PART SECOND.

"And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ."—Eph. iv. 11, 12.

It is a solemn and affecting view of the subject which the apostle here presents, that the overseers and instructors of the Church are "a gift" to it by its ascended Head; and that the work of these officers in the Church is the perfecting, that is, the rectifying and completing, of His "saints," or chosen ones, and the serving and edifying, or the nourishing and rearing up, of His own "body." It teaches us what the world, in its prevalent unbelief, is ever prone to forget,—that the policy of Heaven enters intimately, in many ways, into the policy of earth; and it reminds us that in our treatment of what are called the institutions of human society we may be touching, reverently or profanely, the ordinances of God.

It will be my business to-day to show to some extent how far the pastorate and the membership of this church have appreciated and discharged their reciprocal obliga-

tions during the past twenty-five years. Resuming the thread of my narrative at the point where I dropped it in my last discourse, I may remark that at my assumption of my pastorship, at the close of the year 1843, I found in office only three of the five ruling elders who had been associated with my predecessor. John Henderson, who is entitled perhaps more than any other to the name of the founder of this church, who continued to take the deepest interest in its welfare to the end of his life, and who was a conspicuous example of the piety he sought to promote,—like Enoch, "walking with God," and like Abraham, "commanding his children and his household after him,"—had died in 1841; so that it was never my privilege to know him. Dr. Andrew Macrery I met on my first visit to Natchez, in the spring of 1843. He was then venerable in years, and broken by infirmities, and before my return to the South, in the fall, had gone to his rest. In the three surviving members of the Session, Thomas Henderson, William Pearce, and Franklin Beaumont, I found kind and indulgent friends, able and ready to aid my inexperience with their sympathy and counsels. In the first-named of the three I had an invaluable coadjutor,—one upon whose sage judgment I always leaned with confidence; while he, in his humility and his veneration for the office I bore, was ever disposed to sit at my feet as a little child.

With a Session of this limited constituency, the affairs of the church were conducted quietly and prosperously for the next four years. In the spring of 1848, Messrs.

Pearce and Beaumont having removed from Natchez, the former to Louisiana, and the latter to Texas, where they are still living, it became necessary to replenish the eldership. Accordingly, the congregation, at a meeting held February 13, 1849, elected to that office Dr. John Ker, Samuel B. Newman, and James Carradine, who were subsequently, on the 27th of May following, ordained. Dr. Ker's services were soon withdrawn from the church. He died suddenly, on the 4th of January, 1850, universally respected and lamented by the community. He had been, to a degree unusual with the class of planters to which he belonged, a public-spirited man. That extravagant term, "the soul of honor," sometimes applied to the favorites of the crowd, could perhaps without extravagance have been applied to him, if by it we mean a character marked by pure and liberal principles, by an undeviating regard for justice and probity, and by a spontaneous and infinite detestation of all wrong-doing and all mean-doing; for this he eminently possessed. He was the patron of every good cause, the friend and benefactor of the people, and at one period of his life served the city of Natchez as its representative in the Legislature. In his religion he was as honest and as earnest as he was in everything else. It was a rare spectacle to see one who had grown up among the loose practices and opinions of the early society of Mississippi, and who had been exposed to the temptations of wealth and popularity, as he had been, receiving with meekness the engrafted word of Christ, and then, in meekness of

wisdom, carrying out its precepts as he did; and therefore, and because I had perpetual experience of his paternal kindness from the first hour of my arrival in Natchez, I pay this loving tribute to his worth and memory to-day.

As early as 1845, in the second year of my ministry, I had begun to give a portion of the Sabbath to the religious instruction of the colored population of the city. Previously, with the exception of occasional services rendered by clergymen of the Methodist Church, nothing had been done, under the auspices of our local churches, for the evangelization of this portion of the community. A service was opened for them in the building formerly standing in the rear of this church, and remembered by many of you as the "Session-house;" and I continued to preach to them on the night of each Sabbath, after preaching twice to my regular congregation, more or less for a period of six years. This effort was attended with the most gratifying success. The congregations increased from year to year, until the place became altogether too strait for them. The services I performed among this people were, in some respects, the most satisfactory of any that belong to my public ministrations. The pulpit, in their presence, has fewer of those temptations to self-seeking which in other cases are liable to disturb the purity and simplicity of the preacher's purpose; and the gospel in their hearing, addressing a class of minds where the affections preponderate over the thoughtful judgment and the sober

intelligence, is apt to be listened to with an openness of heart, and a responsive sensibility, which are rare in other assemblies. The attractiveness of these Sunday-night meetings drew to them many of my white congregation; and I shall recall to some of you, I know, by this allusion, many an occasion in which, in sympathy with the crowd before you, you have felt that the truths of Christianity had a strange power, and the plaintive numbers of the sweet hymn, "There is rest for the weary," and the stirring notes even of that ruder one, "The old ship of Zion," have raised your souls to a glow of devotional tenderness or exhilaration akin to that which the finest chant of cathedral choristers might have inspired. And the influence of these services, I am satisfied, was not ineffectual for good. Many from this class were added to the Church; and a faithful walk has demonstrated, of some of them at least, that they were neither insincere nor mistaken in professing themselves Christians. I have seen too many instances among them of faith working by love and purifying the heart, of piety leading to correctness of life and respectability of character, to allow me to doubt that the grace of the gospel, notwithstanding the peculiar disadvantages it has in their case to encounter, can still among them, as among others, convert the natural man into a new creature in Christ. The increasing size of this congregation made it evident that enlarged accommodations should be provided for them; and accordingly, in 1848, measures were adopted for the erection of a new house of worship.

The wants of the Sunday-school, at the same time, indicated the necessity of this step. The Sabbath-school enterprise seems to have been inaugurated in Natchez in the year 1817, about the time of the organization of this church. It was, at its inception, conducted upon the union plan,—most or all of the Protestant congregations participating in it; and the meetings of the school were held in the Baptist church. The first superintendent was Israel Spencer, a member of this church, still living, and holding the office of ruling elder in the church at Port Gibson. I had the opportunity, not long since, of hearing this venerable and beloved father revert to his labors in this department at that early day, when the aged men and women of the present were the boys and girls of this city. Very soon after the commencement of Mr. Potts's ministry,—about the year 1824,—it was thought best to establish a separate school, under the direction of the Presbyterian Church. Of this school Samuel Postlethwaite became the superintendent. He was succeeded by Absalom Pettit; he, by Obadiah Congar; and he, by Alvarez Fisk, whose interest in the youth of Natchez was at a later day attested by those benefactions which laid the foundation of our excellent "Institute." Mr. Fisk was succeeded in 1829 by Thomas Henderson, who continued to preside over the school till his death in 1863. His successor was James Carradine, the present superintendent. It has been my custom, from the beginning of my ministry, to visit this school occasionally, and for many years to do so regularly each

month, and to conduct an examination of the children in the Catechism. During this period I can, therefore, bear intelligent testimony to the excellence of the system of instruction which has prevailed in it; and I have seen the result of it, I have no doubt, in the large number of these children who, in their mature years, have united themselves with the Church. The condition of the school at the present epoch is eminently prosperous,—its roll, including teachers and scholars, numbering about three hundred. It is a valuable auxiliary to the work of the pastor; and the advantages which it offers in the way of religious culture are such as no parent who is not sure that he is accustomed to supply this in a better or at least in as good a form at home, ought to deny to his children.

The growth of this institution, coupled with the wants of the colored congregation, as just intimated, suggested the expediency of erecting a building suited to the purposes of both. With this object in view, the edifice at the corner of Pearl and Washington Streets, known as "the Chapel," was constructed during the course of the year 1848. On the 12th of April, 1849, it was dedicated. Since that time, this commodious building, having twice narrowly escaped destruction by fire, has been the familiar place of resort of the congregation at all their weekly and occasional meetings. It has been identified with the history of the city in its various mutations, having been the spot where the people of all denominations have been wont to gather in their times of public interest, to join

in their thanksgivings or to lift up their cries for deliverance to God.

During the summer of the same year, 1849, a spacious and elegant study was erected on the parsonage-grounds, for the benefit of the pastor; a project, I may remark, which originated with, and was largely paid for by, the young ladies of the "Oakly School," at that time under the care of Miss D. Postlethwaite.

Two years later, in 1851, the size of the church-edifice having become inadequate to meet the wants of the congregation, it was determined to enlarge it. This was done by removing the old "Session-house," purchasing an adjoining lot of ground, and extending the building sixteen feet in the rear, which gave it the dimensions and general appearance that it possesses to-day. In the course of the next year the handsome iron railing which surrounds the church-premises was set up. The expense to the congregation of erecting the chapel and study and improving the church was about $13,000. The fresco-work with which the latter is internally adorned was added in 1859.

In September, 1851, partly to relieve the pastor of the charge of the colored congregation and partly to supply the destitutions of our suburban population, a city mission in connection with this church was established, and the Rev. Daniel McNair invited to conduct it. In addition to the colored congregation in the chapel, Mr. McNair immediately opened a place of worship, and a Sabbath-school, in a hired room on the extreme of St.

Catherine Street. Mr. McNair's efforts in this field continued till May, 1855; and, as the result of them, a manifest improvement took place in the habits of the community among whom he labored, an interesting Sabbath-school was collected, and a number of persons were gathered into the communion of this church. Mr. McNair was succeeded by the Rev. Joseph Weeks in 1855, and he by the Rev. Thomas H. Cleland in 1856.

In this year it was resolved by the trustees of this church to erect a house of worship for the Mission Congregation; and, accordingly, the tasteful edifice at the corner of Pine and Jefferson Streets was built during 1857, and dedicated February 28, 1858. The cost of this building and of a parsonage connected with it was about $10,000. In the fall of 1858, the Mission Congregation having been received by the Presbytery of Mississippi as "the Second Church of Natchez," forty persons from this church were set off to form its membership, ruling elders were elected, and the Rev. Mr. Cleland was chosen as stated supply. In 1860 the house of worship and parsonage provided for the Second Church were conveyed as a gift to the trustees of that corporation by the trustees of the First Church; though, I may remark, the salary of the minister continued, till the dissolution of the Second Church, to be paid mainly by the First Church. Mr. Cleland retained his position till the close of the year 1862, when he removed to another charge. Subsequently to his departure, owing to the distracted condition of the country, the dispersion of members, and

the death and removal of the ruling elders, it was found impossible to sustain the church in active existence; and a year ago, the trustees having reconveyed the property to the First Church, it was declared dissolved by the Presbytery, and the remaining members were directed to connect themselves with the First Church. The property has since been sold, and the church is now owned and used by a society of the Colored Methodist Church.

This enterprise is thus noted because it was one in which this congregation, at the time, took a large interest, and one which, notwithstanding its early extinction, was productive of great public good, and deserves to be put on record as a testimony, for the generation to come, of the evangelic zeal and the "mind to work" which characterized their fathers.

The liberality of the congregation was exhibited also, I may add, about the same period in which it was executing these larger schemes, in the expenditure, in 1856, of the sum of $3852 in repairing and enlarging the parsonage. I find that within the ten years extending from 1850 to 1860 the sums contributed by this church, in various ways, for religious and benevolent objects, amounted to $148,434,—a fact which will serve to show the high grade of prosperity to which the country had advanced, and, at the same time, the readiness of a part at least of the people to consecrate their wealth to the service of God. This period may probably be taken as the palmy decade in the history of the church,—when it could have been said of its members, as of the early

Church, "the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul; neither said any of them that aught of the things which he possessed was his own;" and "walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, they were multiplied."

In January, 1853, the church sustained a heavy loss in the dismissal of Samuel B. Newman, one of its ruling elders, to the Prytania Street Church in New Orleans, to which city he had removed his residence. The eldership being now reduced to two members, an addition to it was made by the election of L. M. Patterson, Oren Metcalf, Alexander J. Postlethwaite, and Thomas C. Pollock on the 29th of June, 1855; who, having accepted the office, were duly ordained on the 8th of July following.

No additions have since been made; but death has not suffered the little band of seven who then constituted the Session of the church, and for a series of years were accustomed to hold fraternal counsel together and join in prayer and deliberation in behalf of the flock of which they were overseers, to remain unbroken until now. On the 6th of March, 1863, Thomas Henderson, after having served the church as a ruling elder for twenty-five years and as superintendent of the Sabbath-school for thirty-four years, departed this life; and on the 3d of December, 1866, Alexander J. Postlethwaite followed him to the grave.

Of these brethren beloved, from the freshness of the sense of bereavement in my own breast, and from my reluctance to open wounds in the hearts of many who

hear me, I am almost afraid to say what I think and know. But I am giving testimony, to-day, from a position which I shall never occupy again; and it seems to me I should leave the history of my pastorate incomplete if I did not signalize the privilege I have enjoyed in being associated with such men. Besides, our departed friends, though dead, yet speak to us when we speak to one another of them; and it is wrong, unjust to our faith, to clothe the death of the Christian with repulsive attributes, or avoid a recurrence to it, as if it were a mere calamity.

The obligations which this church is under to these two men will never be known on earth. They were both distinguished for modesty,—obscured, I may say, by the retiringness of their disposition and habit; and the world was almost as ignorant of the extent of their excellence, as the soil in which the diamond lies buried is of the value of the gem it incloses. Both showed, throughout the whole of their Christian life, that the type of their piety had been drawn, reverently and implicitly, from the Scriptures. They had not speculated a religion into existence for themselves. They had not been accustomed to say, "I believe this or that to be true, because I wish it to be true, or because I think it ought to be true." But, hushing their own wishes and thoughts, they bowed to the majesty of God's word; gave it the credit of absolute truth; informed themselves of its contents; drank of it as their spiritual drink; ate of it as their spiritual food; and so became the healthy

and symmetrical Christians they were,—with their consciences illuminated, and their hearts sanctified, till their thoughts approved and their wishes accepted just what God's word revealed, and, like the Psalmist, they could say, "How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth!" Both had a breadth and a depth of heart which, from their unostentatious temperament, would not have been suspected by those who were not brought into intimate contact with them. Though governed strictly by a regard for duty, they were not the mechanical servants of law. Though attached to the church to which they belonged, they knew nothing of the blindness or exclusiveness of ecclesiastical partisanship. Though rooted and grounded, like the tree's trunk, in the doctrines of the gospel, they showed the efflorescence and the fruitage of the tree's bough, in the affections of the gospel which adorned their characters and their lives. The "love of Christ," as apprehended by them, "constrained" them; and, under the inspiration of this apprehension, they loved Christ first,—then loved the Church which He had redeemed,—and then the world for which He had died. I do not wish to say anything extravagant; and therefore I do not say that they did not have their defects, and that they did not sometimes fall into errors. But I well remember how, on one occasion, happening to hear a cynical skeptic railing at the Church and denouncing professors of religion as hypocrites, when I asked him the question, "Did you ever know Thomas Henderson?" he dropped

his head, and murmured, "Yes,—yes: he was a Christian!"

Mr. Henderson's long connection with, and prominence in, the church, and his position in the mercantile and social world, made his influence to be widely felt and his worth to be generally known. The gifts which he had received from nature, and which had been cultivated by education only to a limited extent, were wonderfully developed and expanded by the anointing from above which had been conferred upon him; so that, in perspicacity of mind, in the well-balanced movement of his judgment, in his clear discernment of the principles of rectitude and the forms and proportions of truth, in the propriety and felicity with which he performed the duties of his office, in the way of public prayer or exhortation, he had very few superiors. His talents forced him, in a measure, out of that retirement which he sought; and the Church at large asked, in various ways, the benefit of his services. He was for many years one of the vice-presidents of the American Colonization Society; from its foundation, a trustee of Oakland College, our synodical institution; a frequent member of our local ecclesiastical councils; and on several occasions a Commissioner from his Presbytery to the General Assembly. His liberality was princely, or rather, let me say, Christian-like. The needy of all classes went to him for aid, without reserve; and the readiness with which it was dispensed revealed the principle upon which he uniformly acted, that in the disbursement of his wealth he

was discharging a stewardship intrusted to him by the Lord. He contributed to the religious and benevolent enterprises of the Church on a scale which far outstripped the rate at which Christians ordinarily estimate their obligations; and the benefactions he dispensed are working to-day in the leavening power which Christianity is exercising in all parts of this land, and living in the schools and churches which are springing up over the world on heathen soil. And, yet, so carefully was this outflow of his liberality ordered,—that it might be a sacrifice to God, and not to his own fame,—that, so far as such a thing could be, it was kept from the eye of man; and perhaps no one but God ever knew its full extent. When he died, the population of the city were his mourners; and over the community, and the church, and the family,—with an intensity increasing as each of these circles grew less,—there hung a stifling sense of loss, as if a presence which had been a safeguard and a blessing to them all, had been withdrawn from them.

Mr. Postlethwaite's term of service and sphere of influence were more contracted; but during that term and within that sphere I have never known a man in whom the "willing mind"—the first requisite of the Christian laborer—was more conspicuously displayed. With him the expression "ye are not your own" was more than a theoretic formula. He realized it in his deepest consciousness, and he acted in accordance with it in his outward life. Totally free from guile, or the craft which ceaselessly revolves about self, his supreme desire was to

be useful,—to help others to be happy. On every inch of earth which his hand could till, he sought to plant a flower. His abilities were given, often with a severe cost to his own comfort, to the Church; and in many a private mission of his own, with which his nearest friends were hardly acquainted, he bore his charities to the poor and his consolations to the sick and the bereaved. He died in his prime; called, we know not why, to higher forms of that pious ministry he had so loved while present with us.

In closing what I shall have to say in regard to the eldership of this church, I cannot but remark, when I recall the seventeen who have borne this office, that the gift of such men as some of them were, and are, is a token of special favor, by its great Head, to the Church. Pillars indeed we may call them, in the house of the Lord, having in them the strength of granite and the beauty of alabaster. And when I hear the man, outside of the Church, making his flippant fling at the hollowness of the piety inside of the Church, I point to these men, and ask if the presence of such wheat is not proof that the piety of the Church is the growth of a Divine planting, sufficient to outweigh all the evidence to the contrary which the presence of the tares to be found in it can afford.

It will be proper now, in carrying out my design, to notice briefly some of the ways in which the church has recognized its relations to the social corporation with which it has been identified, and has promoted, as it was

its duty to do, the good of the community in which it was established.

Not to speak of the bearings upon the intellectual character and habits of a people, of a ministry of the species of that which has officiated in this pulpit and come in contact with the minds of this congregation continuously for a period of fifty years,—bearings which are not often acknowledged, but which cannot be inconsiderable, —I would affirm, first, of the Presbyterian Church in Natchez, that it has always lent its influence to the support of efforts for the promotion of sound popular education. Believing, as we do, that Christianity contemplates man as a rational being, that it proposes to lead him to eternal life through the knowledge of the true God and of Jesus Christ whom He has sent, and that ignorance is the mother neither of devotion nor of morality, but of superstition and vice, we have everywhere aimed to plant the school-house alongside of the church, and to elevate the intelligence of the masses, that, in their ability to think, they might be the better able to understand the claims of Christianity. One of the first bench of ruling elders ordained in this church, Richard Pearce, and the first superintendent of the Sabbath-school, Israel Spencer, were the Principals of an institution of learning, the first of which there is any record in Natchez. During my acquaintance with the city there have always been in it one or more schools of a good character under the charge of persons connected with this church. At one time there were in existence

here no less than three female and one male boarding-schools under such supervision, all well sustained and of a high order. As a part of my duty as a member of the Synod of Mississippi, I have been, from my settlement in the country, a member of the Board of Directors and Trustees of Oakland College, an institution founded by the Presbyterians of the Southwest nearly forty years ago, and the first institution of the kind founded south of Tennessee. The endowment of this college came largely from this congregation; and one individual in it, who chose to be unknown, gave $20,000 to it as the foundation of a Theological Chair. In the year 1845, Natchez witnessed the opening of its Common school, known ever since, and most honorably, as the "Natchez Institute." The enterprise originated with the late Alvarez Fisk, a communicant in this church, who had previously offered to the city several valuable pieces of property upon condition that the corporation would establish a school for the gratuitous education of the youth within its limits. The gift was accepted; and, in pursuance of a resolution adopted by the people at a public meeting, an ordinance imposing an annual tax upon the citizens for the consummation of the design was passed by the Common Council. Much distrust and some opposition in reference to the scheme were entertained; and with the view of allaying these, and under the conviction that in helping forward the scheme I should be serving the cause of Christ, I preached a sermon in this pulpit, April 13, 1845, from the text (Hosea iv.), "My people are de-

stroyed for lack of knowledge,"—in which I urged upon my own congregation, on religious grounds, the duty of sustaining the projected school, and in which I used the following language: "The object is one which should enlist our conscientious co-operation. We should welcome the institution proposed to be established amongst us, as a legitimate ally in the work of human salvation. If it is properly conducted, it is adapted to fulfill this office. It may save many souls from ruin whom ignorance would otherwise have destroyed. And while there is a possibility of its doing this, while it is free to act as the handmaid of religion, it is entitled to receive our warmest countenance and support. With the favor of God vouchsafed to it in answer to our prayers, generations to come will bless us for the pious benefactions which founded it; and a fountain will be opened here, which shall join with countless others, in all lands, in eventually covering the earth with the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." The institution was opened, and, through the favor of God vouchsafed to it, has continued to the present day. It has never had any manner of relationship to this church or any other church; but, inasmuch as the instruction given in it is consonant with the teachings of Christianity, and as all true knowledge is favorable to the ends proposed by Christianity, I have always, as a citizen, watched over it with the liveliest interest; and as an evidence of this I may add that I have annually been a member of the Examining Committee, and on seven or eight occasions have acted as

the chairman of that Committee and prepared the Annual Report to the City Council.

I make this allusion to the Institute, because the origin of it belongs to the period covered by my ministry; and because no small part of the influence by which it has been fostered into its present proportions has come from this congregation.

I claim, in the next place, for the church over which I preside, that it has always been active in supporting schemes of benevolence. While we maintain the distinctive ground upon which the Church stands as a Divine institute, by which it is forbidden to own a parity to itself, on the part of any merely eleemosynary society, we hold that the Church is bound to be pre-eminently an eleemosynary society. We hold it to be a part of pure and undefiled religion "to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction," as well as "to keep ourselves unspotted from the world." In accordance with this theory, I find a number of persons, who afterward composed the membership of this church, uniting with others, as far back as 1816, to form a "Female Charitable Society," the object of which was "the supporting a charity school and the maintaining poor orphans and widows" within the city of Natchez. This society was the germ of the present "Natchez Protestant Orphan Asylum." I find that the Rev. Daniel Smith, then supply to the Presbyterian congregation, preached a sermon for the benefit of this institution in February, 1817; and that in 1821 Samuel Postlethwaite, afterward an elder in this church, when

the institution required a permanent outfit, presented to it a lot of ground at the northeast corner of what are now Pine and Homochitto Streets, upon which the first asylum was built. This institution was and continues to be a public one, under the control of no particular denomination of Christians, but sustained by the contributions of all the Protestant bodies, and presided over by a board of managers chosen from the subscribers. But in their liberality in supporting it, and their self-denying patience in conducting it, I may safely say the members of this church have been second to no others. Some of them are toiling now, I know, in common with their associates from other churches, with a solicitude which is truly maternal, and which hardly allows them rest day or night, to provide means for the support of the sixty-four fatherless little ones whom an almost exhausted treasury threatens with starvation.

Until within late years, another organization existed in the church, called the "Ladies' Benevolent Society," whose donations to some good object annually ranged from three hundred to one thousand dollars. The "poor-fund," created by voluntary offerings on communion Sabbaths, has furnished from two to three hundred dollars, annually, for the use of the indigent.

But, beyond these public methods, I can testify that many in this congregation have made it their business, and found it a pleasure, to minister in private ways to the relief of the needy and suffering. It is a mistake to think there are no sisterhoods and brotherhoods of mercy

in Protestant communities; and I gladly avail myself of this opportunity to proclaim it. I have seen them at work these twenty-five years at their blessed calling. I have seen them, angels in human shape, from this church and from other churches, quietly, and without parade, striving to lighten the burdens of the children of want and woe. I have seen them in times when the epidemic, with its invisible artillery, was prostrating its hundreds each day, hovering over the beds of the squalid and the friendless; and many a sufferer, I am sure, has felt, as Florence Nightingale's soldier did, like kissing their shadows as they passed. I am cognizant of the fact that within these last two years, when the destitution of our population in some cases almost reached the starving and the freezing point, the hearts of many a household have been made glad by seeing bread on their tables and fire on their hearths, furnished by benefactors whom they did not know. The almoners here have made no advertisement of their deeds. Untrumpeted and unmarked, they have asked no praise, no reward, from man. They will get them, I trust, when He, out of love to whom they have so labored, and whose spirit they have so exemplified, shall say to them, "Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these, ye did it unto me."

I would bear witness also to this third fact, that this church, ever since I have known it, has maintained, at least to some good degree, an attitude in favor of the social moralities which Christianity enjoins. In its public testimony, and by the example, I think I can say, of

most of its members, it has sought to subserve the public virtue, and, so, the public good, by checking the tendency of the age and the locality to extravagance, to intemperance, to Sabbath-desecration, and to illicit amusements. And though abounding vice may sometimes have broken over its borders and intruded into its territory, I persuade myself that the presence of this church in the community has been, in many a direction, a barrier to the torrent of excess and corruption which has been setting upon it.

The history I have undertaken to give would not be complete, perhaps, if I did not make at least a brief allusion to three extraordinary periods which have occurred during my ministry.

The first to which I refer is the epidemic season of 1853. Up to that date I had never witnessed a visitation of the yellow fever in a general and unequivocal form. The security in which we had allowed ourselves to fall was suddenly broken that year by the appearance of several cases of this dreaded disease, as early as August; and in a short time its presence in the city was acknowledged by the public authorities. Many of you will remember the panic which ensued. The portion of the population which could escape fled, as from an invading foe, to such places of shelter as they could find in the country. The residue, consisting to a large extent of unacclimated persons, remained to await their fate. There were few of them whom the pestilence did not reach; and many of them it carried to the grave. For

nearly four months the places of business were generally closed. The grass literally sprung up in our untrodden streets; and the silence, not of a Sabbath, but of a funeral hour, hung over our usually bustling city. With the exception of once, when I was absent in the country, religious service was held during the whole summer at the regular time, once each Sabbath, in the chapel; where a few of my stricken flock found it a comfort to seek the consolations of the sanctuary. Such scenes of sorrow as I was compelled to witness may, perhaps, have been useful to me as a part of my training for my office; but they are such as I pray God I may never have to witness again. I tried to do my duty as a minister of religion during that season, and in the doing of it experienced literally the fulfillment of the promise, "A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand, but it shall not come nigh thee." The scourge slowly withdrew itself; the last victim was a beautiful and gifted young lady, who had in a false confidence returned from her retreat to the town, and whom we laid in her grave on the 6th of December; and then, as I believe generally happens after such appalling disturbances of the public composure, the tide of life and business and pleasure flowed back again as buoyantly as though eternity had not been flashing its light upon the vanity of them all.

The second period to be noted is the summer of 1858, distinguished for the remarkable revival of religion which occurred generally throughout our city. Chris-

tians of the various denominations, moved, as it seemed, by a spontaneous impulse, began to ask if some portion of the gracious shower which was visiting other portions of the land might not be caused to descend upon this thirsty spot; and, as the result of their conferences, a daily union prayer-meeting was opened at the chapel on the morning of May 3, which was continued, without intermission, till the beginning of the following November. A month previously to this, I had commenced a daily service in the afternoon, for the special benefit of my own congregation. The latter of these meetings I conducted entirely for seven months; the former I assisted in maintaining for nearly the same length of time. The hours spent together thus, in the house of prayer, will be recalled by many as hallowed seasons; and hundreds, probably, look back to the summer of 1858 as the time of their spiritual birth.

The third epoch which deserves a mention is the dark and dismal period embraced by the late war, extending from 1861 to 1865. At the commencement of this period, foreseeing that it was to be a time of trial and calamity to my friends, and of peril to the interests of the kingdom of Christ, I resolved to direct my efforts conscientiously to the mitigating of the one and the protecting of the other. The sad incidents of the period—the horrors which lie inclosed within that deep gulf—I have no disposition to uncover. A storm terrific beyond precedent—so strange in its inception, its progress, and its results, that, it seems to me, men ought to stand awe-

stricken before it, as before one of the most wonderful of God's wonderful works—swept over our land, leaving it the bereaved, the impoverished, the disorganized territory we see it to-day. Happily for us, our town was not found available for any strategic purposes; and until 1863 the literal convulsions of war hardly disturbed the quiet of our community. Once only, on the evening of the memorable 2d of September, 1862, we were exposed for three hours to the fire of a fleet of gunboats from the river, by which the town was extensively damaged, though the lives of the inhabitants, with one exception, were almost miraculously preserved. Not without reason, on this occasion, our almost unaccountable deliverance was connected in the minds of the people with the fact that they had not ceased, week by week, during the war, to assemble for common prayer, to supplicate from God that fatherly compassion which our exigencies needed; prayer, I may remark, which, for the most part, those who conducted it strove to have chastened with that humility and submissiveness which at all times become the petitions of weak and fallible men, and especially become them in times of fevered popular excitement. After the occupation of the town, on the 13th of July, 1863, Natchez became a military post. Soon after this, domestic sorrow again invaded my household; and, accepting the opportunity kindly offered me by the commandant of the post, I visited my native State, in the vain hope, as the event proved, of saving the life of a beloved child. On my return in December, I found

Natchez a swarming hive of strangers, and the church—in which, as God's house, accommodation had been, properly, extended to all—filled on the Sabbath with a crowd of worshipers of whom scarcely one in ten was known to me. The regular service of the Sabbath morning was continued from that time until the close of the war enabled me to resume the usual routine of duty. During this anomalous period, I can say, the gospel was preached in this pulpit with the sincere desire that it should prove the power of God unto salvation to all who heard it; and I am not without the hope that it will be found in eternity that the seed then sown has taken root in souls whom personally I never knew. No one, I think, can review the dealings of God with this church during the successive stages of the war, without acknowledging that they were characterized by singular goodness, and without feeling confirmed in the conviction that it was not a vain thing to put ourselves, as we did, at the outset of the convulsion, under the shadow of His wings.

These recitals, perhaps, cover the ground which ought to be occupied by my narrative. I will only add that since the reassembling of my scattered flock, in 1865, we have been mainly learning the depth of poverty to which we have been reduced, and the multiplied embarrassments into which the vicissitudes of the past few years have thrown us. Still, we have encouraged ourselves in the Lord our God, and He has not failed us. He has enabled us to maintain our existence amid the difficulties which thickened upon us, year by year, until

now we can look around upon the auspicious change which the past year has wrought, and hope the crisis is over; and the hardships of our adversities may bequeath us a blessing, by making us a more diligent, self-denying, and trustful people. Like Israel with the Red Sea behind them, it becomes us to-day to join in a grateful chorus, and proclaim, "The Lord is my strength and song, and He is become my salvation: He is my God, and I will prepare Him an habitation; my fathers' God, and I will exalt Him!"

As entering into our ecclesiastical history, perhaps I ought to mention just one fact more. In the year 1861, in consequence of the dismemberment of the nation, the Presbyterians in the Southern States generally found themselves obliged to effect a complete organization of their own, and, therefore, constituted a General Assembly, in which they have since been annually represented, and which ultimately assumed the title of "The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States." With this body this church, through its Presbytery, is organically connected. How long this separateness of organization will continue, or ought to continue, I of course am not authorized to say. Fractures which heal slowly perhaps heal most effectually; and it would seem that, in a normal state of things, fractures in any body ought to heal some time. I cannot, therefore, withhold the expression of the hope that a personal unity, generated by the Spirit of God, may soon prepare the way for the knitting together in their

old relations of the whole Presbyterian family of the country.

I have set before you thus, dear brethren, a few particulars in the ministry of this church for the last twenty-five years, which may serve, to some extent, to show how the office which I have borne, as your pastor, has been discharged. The reverse side of the history,—the account of my "neglectings" of the gift which has been in me,—I am well aware, could be given, and perhaps given by no one better than myself. This, however, ought to be confessed to a higher tribunal than yours.

Let me glance a moment, before I conclude, at the manner in which you have acquitted yourselves of your obligations under the gift bestowed upon you by your Divine Lord.

It would be strange ingratitude if I did not say that during my long residence among you I have been followed personally by your unwavering kindness. On several occasions, when I have been solicited to change my charge, the argument which has kept me here has been that you did not want me to go. At the end of these twenty-five years' labors, I believe I may call every individual, not merely in this congregation, but in Natchez,—so far as its people are known to me,—my friend. I have become embosomed in this society, not merely in fact, but in spirit. My relations with other clergymen and other congregations have always been pleasant and cordial; and among the latter my services have been extensively rendered. No root of bitterness

has ever sprung up to trouble the harmony which has subsisted between me and my flock. I mention this, to show that that flock must have discharged their duty in the one particular, at least, of "esteeming very highly in love for their work's sake" those who have been set over them in the Lord. I have not a whisper of complaint to utter in respect to your treatment of me; unless it be that your love has led you to lean upon me too much and upon yourselves too little. The occasion is too solemn to allow an indulgence in flattery; and therefore, in praising you for your care of me, I ought not to conceal from you that my observation has led me to notice in you the following defects,—which, if they exist here, exist only because this congregation is made up of the same infirm materials of which all congregations are composed.

First, I think there is among you too much of an easy or drowsy habit in looking at the vineyard in which, as the Lord's laborers, you are called to work. In a community where every one is as independent and as free from need as was the case formerly with this, it is not strange, perhaps, that you should have taken it for granted that the world was so comfortable that there was no occasion for you to ask the question if there was any service which it needed at your hands. This was a wrong conclusion, however, even in respect to such a community as this was. The world is always, and in every part of it, a groaning and a travailing world; and it becomes the faithful Christian to remember this, and

to keep his eye open with an outlooking benevolence, and his foot moving with a pre-eminent helpfulness, which shall suffer no opportunity of doing good to escape him, and shall spare him the pain of saying, when such an opportunity has gone by unimproved, "I am sorry I did not know of this."

Second, I think there is among you too much of a disposition to overlook what I may call your corporate obligations as members of the Church. Religion, as I have often taught you, is the Christian's business; and the Church is organized in part that it may aid each Christian in doing his business. It is an association of men who are described as "fervent in spirit, serving the Lord." It cannot do the work of these men. It cannot do its own work unless each man in it recognizes his obligation to do his portion of it. The Church is but the aggregate of the individuals in it; and it is nugatory for any individual to argue that because a Church exists he is absolved from all obligation to work in his private capacity and sphere.

Third, I think there has been evidence of an undue laxness in your loyalty to the principles and claims upon which your Church asserts its right to the character of a Church. I know it is our privilege to hold a theory which allows the largest liberality in the recognition of other bodies as churches of Christ. We believe the Church, in its true form, to consist of all who show that they have been redeemed by the blood of Christ and are animated by the Spirit of Christ. We cast out none

whom we have reason to believe the Lord has accepted. External and economical matters we regard as secondary to this prime condition in the constituency of the Church; and therefore, though other bodies differ from us in these, if we can call them Christians in the sense of the New Testament, we fraternize with them, we commune with them, we make no attempt to proselyte them. But in doing this we are not renouncing our preference for our own Church, nor discrediting the reasons which make us believe it is entitled to our preference. Now, what I wish to say is, that if that Church is worthy of being a spiritual home for us, it is worthy of being the same for all who look to us for guidance. It is worthy of being the same for our children. And if we do not strive to keep them in it, if we allow them to wander to other folds, we are disloyal to the principles and claims upon which that Church rests, and are suffering divisions to break into our families, where, to say the least, there is no necessity for it.

Fourth, I think I may say there is not enough of religious study among you. Theological learning and ecclesiastical intelligence are suffered to be too much the monopoly of those who teach you. We are not the robust and thorough-working Christians our fathers were, because we do not search the Scriptures as they did, and do not concern ourselves with the concerns of Christ's kingdom as they did. I hold that "the faith once delivered to the saints" ought to be a subject of interest always to the saints; and the mission of the Church, to

convert the world, ought to enlist the solicitude and attention of all who belong to the Church.

And, fifth, I think there is prevalent among you too weak a sense of the authority and value of the divine ordinances of Sabbath-keeping and public worship. The world has its canons and customs, and they press upon us with tremendous power. Self has its desires to urge and its arguments by which to sustain them. But neither the exactions of the world nor the solicitations of self should be suffered by the Christian to trench upon the institutions and enactments of God. Religion, which is obedience to these institutions and enactments, is worth all the cost the practice of it involves. The benefit derived from a Sabbath well kept will outweigh all the gain which may possibly accrue to us from a Sabbath broken; and the blessing which may come to us in the house of God will be cheaply purchased by the effort and the inconvenience demanded of us in going there.

Suffer these few hints, dear brethren, as I close the reminiscences which this interesting occasion has called up. The spot on which I stand to-day is to me very solemn ground. The history of twenty-five years of transactions with immortal souls lies behind me; before me, the intervening vista is so short, so uncertain, I see nothing but eternity. It would be wild presumption to suppose that the end of another quarter-century will find me here. Four generations have sat within these walls. Of the first, a few yet survive,—patriarchs leaning on their staves and waiting for their departure. To the

second, the old men and women of the day belong, appearing among us with ranks already sadly thinned by death. The third are the fathers and mothers now presiding in our homes. And the fourth are their children. So we pass away, like the waves, breaking and dying, in regular succession and with mournful cadence, upon the sand. "For all flesh is as grass; and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away. But the word of the Lord endureth forever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you." Yes, beloved, from all this fleeting pageant which has been passing before me as I have pursued this narrative, from these vanished families, changed homesteads, broken love-links, death-beds and graves, among which I have been wandering, I turn to this blessed gospel, whose truths, whose promises, whose gifts, endure forever; and I feel that I love it more, and I promise myself that, by God's grace, I will preach it with more fidelity, than ever before. And I charge you, my people, to hear it from my lips, in all time to come, with these thoughts in your hearts, that as we have stood together to-day where we can stand only once, so life itself, with its opportunities of salvation, is a handbreadth, where you can stand only once; and that, if these opportunities are not improved while they are given, the regret which will follow you into the long eternity, where you must soon pass as your forefathers have done, will be endured only once, but that once will be FOREVER.

With these thoughts pressing upon my own heart, I feel as if I could not let this occasion pass, as if I could not quit a spot made so tender by its reminiscences and so serious by its prospects, without addressing a special admonition to some of you, to whom peculiar circumstances give a prominent place in my regards to-day. There are those among you who have traveled with me, step by step, through these twenty-five years,—who heard, perhaps, my first sermon in this house, and have continued to be my hearers ever since,—but who have never yet, by any authentic sign, indicated that you have embraced the faith which I have been trying to inculcate. Year by year, Sabbath by Sabbath, I have met you here, and met you thankfully and in the hope that the message you were to hear might be the one which should carry life to your souls and win you to the Saviour. But, thus far, this hope has been disappointed. Such disappointment is a bitter trial to a minister of the gospel. He never can speak the pain, the sorrow, it causes him. May I not ask to-day, from friends who have stood by me personally and borne my counsels and reproofs in my official teachings so long, if there is not some response due to the propositions of the gospel made to them thus for twenty-five consecutive years, and if, in view of the arguments and considerations by which those propositions have been sustained, that response ought not to be like that of the eunuch to Philip, —"I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. See; here is water. What doth hinder me to be baptized?"

Some of you are growing old. These flying years have left their traces upon your whitening brows and your bowed frames. We cannot meet here together much oftener. O my friends, cannot we meet on ground nearer to Christ and nearer to heaven,—cannot we meet at the sacramental table and join in the blessed festival which tells of a common redemption and a common hope of glory,—before we part on earth forever?

There is another class, who once were my hearers, but now are not. From some cause, not easily assigned, they have forsaken my ministry and abandoned the house of God. In private they maintain the kindest relations with me, and I do not imagine that they would say that my preaching has had the effect to convince them that the gospel is unworthy of their respect and credence. I fear some wile of the evil one has bound them with a spell. I fear that he who in the beginning overthrew an ordinance of God with the lying assurance, "Ye shall not surely die," has persuaded them that the ordinances of God are still worthless and may be neglected without damage or guilt. My words this morning, probably, do not reach them; but some report may bear to them my affectionate entreaty, uttered as I enter to-day upon this new stage of my journey, with my face looking directly into that eternity which lies before us both, that they will come back to their Father's house and prosecute with me the residue of our way to that eternity under the shadow of His altars and the promises of His covenant.

And the young men of my charge, who have grown up under my teaching, some of whom were baptized by my hands,—may I not ask them, as I see them to-day lifted to the heights of enterprise and power by these same years which have carried me over the summit and turned my steps downwards toward the vale beyond,—may I not ask them if it is not time that they had taken their position, heartily and boldly, as the followers and friends of the Saviour? The shoulders which have borne the ark hitherto in our Israel are dropping rapidly away. The servants who have ministered in the Lord's house in former years, you have seen, have largely passed into history. Those of us who now serve at its altars will soon have our place in history too. Oh, upon whom should the mantle of the fathers fall but upon their sons? Young men of this congregation, the past, with its sacred memories, the future, with its precious hopes and interests, are calling to you to come and take your stand bravely on the ground of your fathers' faith and by the side of your fathers' Redeemer, and to do in your day the work for God and His Church, which they did in theirs, that at last, beyond the lapse of years and the waste of death, they and you may meet together in "the Church of the first-born, which are written in heaven."

A FORTY YEARS' PASTORATE.

A SERMON

PREACHED ON THE SABBATH, JANUARY 6, 1884,

IN THE

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, NATCHEZ, MISS.

BY

REV. JOSEPH B. STRATTON, D.D.,

PASTOR.

PRINTED BY

J. B. LIPPINCOTT & CO., PHILADELPHIA.

1884.

SERMON.

"And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness."—DEUT. viii. 2.

THE narrative of the transfer of the Hebrew race from Egypt to Canaan strikes us probably as something apart from legitimate human history. What gives it this exceptional character is the fact that it abounds with extraordinary Divine interpositions in behalf of the people concerned. The Lord their God led them through all their way by direct and sensible tokens. After all, however, the warp of the movement, viewed separately from the supernatural material which is inwoven with it, stands side by side with a hundred or a thousand analogous events to be found in the annals of the world. It is simply the spectacle of an enslaved race freeing themselves from bondage, migrating to another territory, conquering it, and planting themselves there as an organized commonwealth. The spectacle is different from that presented in ordinary history, because the veil is lifted from the force which was working behind its successive developments, as the exposure of the mechanism beneath the face of a

watch reveals the force which determines the measured motion of the hands upon the dial. It is not unreasonable to conclude that if the veil were lifted from the secret springs of historic events in the case of other nations and communities, the finger of God would be seen to be touching and directing those springs as clearly as we are permitted to see it doing this work in the case of the Israelites. This is the doctrine of a Divine Providence, a doctrine which men must hold in order to possess anything worthy of the name of a religion. It is a doctrine revealed everywhere in the Bible, and illustrated here in the case of the Hebrew race by an actual literal example. We may cease to look at the forty years occupied in the exodus of the Hebrews as an anomalous period therefore, and may use, concerning any similar period in the life of any other people, the language of Moses in the text: "Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness." Wherever history is, however contracted the theatre may be, there is the hand of God. It is, my brethren, that we may trace the operations of that hand during a portion of our history as a church that we have come together this morning.

Forty years ago, in this house, I was invested by apostolic authority, and through the medium of apostolic rites, first, with the office of a Christian minister, and then, with the special charge of this church as its chief bishop and pastor. I need hardly remark it was to me a moment of absorbing interest, and of almost overpowering signifi-

cance. I find in an old memorandum-book an entry bearing date the 31st of December, 1843, in these words: "This day I was ordained by the Presbytery of Mississippi to the ministry of the gospel, and installed pastor of the Natchez Church. An eventful future and a solemn eternity lie before me. God help me to fulfil the vows my soul has made!" Forty years of that "eventful future" which I then anticipated lie behind me now, and but a short space, at the longest, divides me from that "solemn eternity" which I then saw in the distance. The events of that future, now the past, it will be my object to some extent to review. I am reminded at the outset that when I say I became pastor of *this* church in 1843, I must make the statement with some qualification. In its constituency this church is to-day almost an entirely different body of people from what it was when I assumed the charge of it. The pastor survives, but where are the hands which then grasped his in fellowship, and the tongues which then gave him a loving welcome? The forms of those who at my installation composed the membership of this congregation have for the most part passed away. I count on the roll of communicants but sixteen of the two hundred and five who constituted its membership in 1843. Of this original band many have removed to other localities, and some are surviving in other parts of the country. Among these I may notice the name of Mr. Franklin Beaumont, who was one of the three ruling elders in office at the time when I became pastor of the church. He is now a venerable man, nearly or quite ninety years of age, and is

spending the evening of his long life in the town of Ludlowville, in New York. In a letter recently received from this aged patriarch, the only being remaining on earth who officially participated in the ceremonies of my installation, he utters these words of benediction: "May God be with you, my former pastor, and your dear family, caring for you and strengthening you for every good word and work!" The great majority of the flock who received me as their youthful shepherd have been translated by death. Of the ministers belonging to the Presbytery of Mississippi at the period of my induction into my office, not one is now living. It is an interesting fact that one of these ministers was the Rev. William Montgomery, one of the first party of pioneers who, under a commission from the Synod of North Carolina, visited the Territory of Mississippi in 1801, and planted the foundations of the Presbyterian Church in this then wilderness of the Southwest. "Father Montgomery," as he had come to be called long before I knew him, made the ordaining prayer at my ordination, and delivered the charge to the pastor at my installation. Through this link the term of my ministry connects itself historically with the chain which carries us back to the inception of Presbyterianism in the Southwest. The church of which I am pastor today consists very largely of those who were infants when I began my ministry, or who have been born since that date. The children who are brought to me now for baptism are the children of those whom I baptized long years ago, and in some cases the children of these children.

I have lived to see one upon whose brow in childhood I placed the sacramental seal a ruling elder in the church. One generation has given place to another, and this other begins to feel the presence and the pressure of a third; so that the facts of yesterday, as they seem to me, are growing into traditions among those who now occupy the stage, and the men and women who are to me living beings, when my memory recalls them and my tongue speaks of them, are by those around me apprehended only as myths or shadows. The sweep of forty years over the world is like that of a mighty flood,—it leaves scarcely a vestige of the objects which were standing at the beginning. Nothing impresses the mind more forcibly—and, I may add, more sadly—with the ephemeral character of the present life than the rapidity with which the traces of man's existence may be erased from the scenes and walks which he once filled. From the list of those who have trod these streets, dwelt in these homes, worshipped in these pews, I could mention the names and picture the forms of many who illustrated the noblest types of manhood and womanhood, who stood in their places in the church and in society like majestic pillars or graceful corner-stones, bearing up by their example and testimony the manifold interests of the community so visibly, that to the eye of their contemporaries it seemed that their continued presence was a condition essential to the continuance of truth and righteousness on the earth. And yet they have gone like the leaves of autumn, and in the short space of forty years the ground on which they acted their parts is peopled

by a race who cannot remember them, and can hardly be made to understand that such persons ever lived. This vanishing so quickly and so completely of things so real, and embodying in themselves so grandly every element by which a right to endure could be substantiated, from the sphere where they had begun their existence is to my mind proof conclusive that this life is only an initial state, pointing as by a necessary sequence to an immortal one beyond it. A world which has proved itself incapable of keeping safe that which had so shown itself entitled to a safe-keeping must certainly be followed by another which shall better preserve the treasure intrusted to it. Extinction in such a case is incredible. The earth turns on its axis, and the stars which blazed in the sky sink one by one below the horizon and seem to have perished; but they have only left one hemisphere to kindle the firmament of another. The eaglet in its nest feathers its wings from day to day, and moulds and fills out the symmetry of its royal form, and then disappears. The nest is vacant, but the eaglet is floating yonder in the wide empyrean, with its pinions flashing back the lustre of the sunbeams.

It will be remembered by many of you that in January, 1869, at the close of the first quarter-century of my ministry, I delivered two discourses, presenting the main facts in the history of this church up to that point. Those discourses were published, and are perhaps in the hands of most of you. They can be furnished to those who do not possess them. The period canvassed in those dis-

courses it will not be necessary to review on the present occasion, only so far as to reveal the thread which connects the events of the subsequent fifteen years with the early facts of our history. Recurring briefly to some of these facts, I remark that the organization of the Presbyterian Church in Natchez dates from the year 1817, when nine persons,—four males and five females,—under the direction of the Rev. Daniel Smith, a minister from New England, who had been laboring for some time in the city, were enrolled as members. To these nine others were shortly after added, and a corps of ruling elders, consisting of John Henderson, Joseph Forman, Richard Pearce, and William B. Noyes, was elected. The Rev. Mr. Smith was invited to minister to the infant church as stated supply. Prior to this the few Presbyterians in Natchez had been accustomed to worship at the Pine Ridge Church, then called "Salem Church," which had been organized in 1807, and in which John Henderson and Joseph Forman had served as ruling elders. As far back as 1800 and 1801, Natchez had received a visit from three ministers of the Presbyterian denomination, who had been sent out by the Synod of North Carolina on an exploring tour to the Territory of Mississippi,—the Rev. James Hall, the Rev. James Bowman, and the Rev. William Montgomery.

These missionaries, or some of them, devoted several months to labors in this city, and so favorable was the impression left by them, that on their departure an address of thanks, signed by more than thirty of the leading

citizens, was presented to them, closing with a request that they would return, or send others to complete the work they had begun. In 1808 the Rev. Jacob Rickhow, a minister in connection with the Presbytery of New Brunswick, in New Jersey, arrived at Natchez, and for several years taught a school and preached to a small congregation. The erection of a Presbyterian house of worship was projected in 1810, and in 1812 the corner-stone of a building was laid on the spot where our present church edifice stands. The building was of brick, and occupied the summit of a hill corresponding with the one still standing on the opposite side of State Street. It was completed and dedicated in 1815. In this church the congregation worshipped till 1829, under the ministry, successively, of the Rev. Daniel Smith, stated supply from 1817 to 1819; the Rev. William Weir, a clergyman from Ireland, the first regularly installed pastor, from 1820 to 1822; and the Rev. George Potts, a native of Philadelphia, who was installed second pastor in 1823. In 1828–29 the original church edifice was taken down, the hill graded to the level of the present site, and a new structure erected, which, after having undergone various internal changes and having been lengthened sixteen feet in 1851, forms substantially the building in which we still worship. In 1835, Mr. Potts resigned the pastorship in order to accept a call to a church in New York; and in 1837, Rev. Samuel G. Winchester, a native of Baltimore, and previously pastor of a church in Philadelphia, was installed the third pastor of the Natchez Church. Mr. Winchester

having died in 1841, the church remained vacant until December 31, 1843, when I was installed its fourth pastor. At the close of Mr. Weir's ministry there were forty-nine communicants on the roll; at the close of Mr. Potts's, one hundred and thirty-five; and at the close of Mr. Winchester's, two hundred and five. To the original four ruling elders there were added, by successive elections, Samuel S. Spencer, in 1818; Dr. Andrew Macrery, in 1821; Samuel Postlethwaite, in 1825; and Thomas Henderson, William Pearce, and Franklin Beaumont, in 1838. These last three constituted the eldership at the time of my installation.

To complete just here the enumeration of those who have filled this important office in the house of God, I may add that in 1849, Mr. Pearce and Mr. Beaumont having removed to other States, the Session was reinforced by the election of Dr. John Ker, Samuel B. Newman, and James Carradine. Dr. Ker lived only to the following year, and in 1853, Mr. Newman removed to New Orleans. An addition of four new members was made in 1855, by the election of L. M. Patterson, Oren Metcalf, Alexander J. Postlethwaite, and Thomas C. Pollock. Mr. Thomas Henderson, the patriarch of the Session, and the exemplar of every grace and gift which characterizes the faithful bishop, died in 1863, and Mr. Postlethwaite followed him to the eternal rest in 1866. In 1871 a further, and the last, accession to the eldership was made by the election of John W. Henderson, Frederick J. V. Lecand, and James Carson, Esq. No breach in the body as thus constituted

occurred till May 1, 1875, when it pleased God to remove from it a brother beloved in the person of James Carradine. For twenty-six years Mr. Carradine had devotedly served and tenderly borne upon his heart the interests of the church of which the Holy Ghost had made him overseer. From the death of Mr. Henderson he had been invested by the Session with the office of superintendent of the Sabbath-school. The exercise of this office was to him truly a labor of love. With a parental fondness he watched over his youthful charge, and with the magnetic power which an enthusiastic temperament and a kind heart threw into all his dealings with others, he drew to him the affection and confidence of his flock. In early life, at a time when for a young man to embrace a religious life was to make himself singular, perhaps unpopular, in his circle, he had the manliness to obey the dictates of his conscience, and the courage to avow himself a follower of the Saviour, "despising the shame." With him the profession of his faith was no pious form, no mere assumption of the decencies of a religious walk; it was a consecration of his entire soul and life to God. The conception of the love of Christ, impressed upon his heart at the beginning of his career, was so simple, and yet so profound, that he never ceased to be under the constraining power of it. His zeal made him ready to use whatever talents he possessed in his Master's service, and the fervency of his spirit gave to all his efforts a glowing heat and force. Under these circumstances it was not hard for him to open his lips in public prayer, or to express his

convictions of truth or duty in public exhortation. Mr. Carradine was a man of business, and felt that, as such, it was in the sphere of business that his religion was most carefully to assert itself. His circumspection here made him, by the testimony of all his associates, an upright and honest man. Overtaken by disaster in his early enterprises, he never rested till every obligation he was under to others had, by patient toil and economy, been fully discharged. Through years of subsequent prosperity he maintained a credit without a flaw, and a character so uncorrupt that it was more than half the basis of his credit. And in his last days, when the storm again prostrated him, it was, perhaps, the overstrain of his efforts to be just to others, when others had failed to be just to him, and the hard sacrifices he made in order to save that good name which he valued more than wealth, which exhausted both mind and body, and left him an easy prey to the assaults of disease. Alike in his blessings and his chastisements he acknowledged the loving kindness of God, and, perfected by the gracious discipline contained in each, he passed at his death, we may be sure, into the rest which God has prepared for His weary ones. He was a whole-hearted lover of his church, and found in its society and fellowship and its institutions and usages the provision which his soul craved. And to-day, I am persuaded, it will be a pleasure to many who remember him to use with me this occasion to recall his worth, and to bedew with a fresh tear his grave.

Since the first draft of this discourse was written, intel-

ligence has reached us of the death, on the 1st of this present month, of Mr. L. M. Patterson, another of the ruling elders of the church. Elected in 1855, Mr. Patterson's term of office has extended through twenty-eight years. For nearly or quite fifty years he has been a devoted member of this church. Embarking in mercantile business in his early years, he shared in the general prosperity of the period, until the reverses of 1838–39 involved him with hundreds of others in commercial ruin. Since that time his life has been a struggle with a series of vicissitudes, alleviated by few glimpses of happiness. He was patient and retiring in his disposition, firm in his religious principles, and ever ready to obey the call of duty. His charity was proverbial, his sympathies wide, and his many good deeds gained for him the reputation of the friend of the poor. For several years his accumulated infirmities made it necessary for him to retire from active life, and in the home provided for him by his daughters, surrounded by their loving ministries, at the age of eighty, he closed his eyes upon a clouded world, to open them, we trust, upon that brighter one where failure and disappointment are unknown.

Of the remaining members of the Session, it may not be out of place to remark that the years which have passed since their assumption of their office have, in the case of most of them, left their imprint in the way of impaired health and efficiency. They begin to show by many signs the enfeebling effects of age or disease. These facts are referred to that I may call attention to an

exigency which evidently impends over us as a church. The time is near when, among those who are enlisted in the service of Christ, some will be needed to maintain the order of His house by bearing office in it. The call of God to undertake the work of the ruling elder comes to certain of His covenanted servants, just as distinctly as it comes to others to undertake that of the teaching elder. And this call is to be recognized largely in providential circumstances. That call is apparently even now addressing the challenge to some in this church: "Who among you are ready, like Joshua of old, to step into the place of the departing Moses, and go in and out among God's people as the leaders of His host?" And the duty is laid no less clearly upon these people of God at this juncture to be earnest in prayer, that His spirit may so move upon the hearts of those whom He is calling to this work, and may so touch their hands and their tongues, that they shall willingly offer themselves as guides and guardians of His flock when the older shepherds are gone.

I may add at this point that in the year 1872 the organization of the church was for the first time made complete by the introduction into it of a Board of Deacons. The care of the poor, and the other forms of duty belonging to this office, had not previously been so urgent as to demand the services of a special body of men. The necessity for them became more and more apparent during the years which followed the late civil war, when the crowding into the town of numbers of emancipated slaves incapable of providing for themselves, the failure

of investments to yield an income, and the lack of employment for mechanics so multiplied the cases of destitution and distress that the casual liberality of individuals was no longer adequate to abate the general distress. Accordingly, the church felt called upon to undertake this ministry of charity, and proceeded to elect as its agents, on the 24th of April in the year just mentioned, five deacons, viz.: William Abbott, James W. H. Patterson, Thomas Mason, John Harper, and Hiram M. Baldwin. A great amount of good has been systematically and judiciously done within the last ten years by this excellent Board. God's bounty, through the hands of these almoners, has flowed into many a poverty-stricken home, has comforted many a penniless invalid, and has brought relief to many a desolate heart. Since 1872 some two thousand three hundred dollars in money has been distributed by the deacons. The original Board remains in office at the present time, with the exception of Hiram M. Baldwin, who departed this life August 20, 1873. Coming into the church by a profession of his faith during the revival of 1858, Mr. Baldwin brought with him convictions of Christian doctrine and of religious duty which had been derived from the Word of God and fastened upon his mind by early training, and which were kindled into active motives and principles by his vivid apprehension of the grace of Christ in redemption. His heart was given to the service of his Master and to the work of the church. As a prominent merchant for many years in this city, his character was distinguished for probity, and as a Christian

his piety was of a simple and childlike type, and steady and consistent in all its outward expressions. His light shone with a calm but unequivocal lustre while he lived, and his death was lamented by the church as an almost irreparable calamity.

I have alluded to the very natural remark which I penned on the night of the day of my installation, when with a trembling glance I was exploring the darkness which enveloped the way upon which I was entering,—"an eventful future lies before me." I can say to-day, as I look back over the period covered by my ministry, that it has verified at every point the character which it bore in the vision of it which, forty years ago, loomed up before my excited imagination. That period has been an eminently eventful one. Changes in the condition of the world, so stupendous that no thoughtful mind can fail to see in them the august unfoldings of a Divine intelligence and plan, have been crowded, like the miracles of the exodus, into this brief space. The political map of every quarter of the globe has been more or less altered. Political theories have been materially modified. The functions of government have come to be better defined and more generally understood, and the prerogatives of rulers and the rights of the ruled are vibrating in almost all lands into a juster equilibrium. Religious toleration is granted on a scale never known before. A Bible Depository stands within the shadow of the Vatican at Rome. Arbitration, guided by reason and justice, is offering itself, as an umpire in national disputes, as a substitute for grim-

visaged war; and olive-crowned plenipotentiaries, deliberating in quiet halls, now settle controversies which once could have been adjusted only on bloody battle-fields. International expositions of the arts of industry and the products of agriculture,—œcumenical gatherings of religious bodies, evangelical alliances and associations bringing the men of kindred faith from every section of the globe into council,—have become an institution of the age, and are visibly breaking down the barriers of ecclesiasticism and sectarian prejudice and animosity which have heretofore divided the families of God's people. Christendom has been distributing the arts of civilization all along the lines of its commerce, and Christian missions have been bearing that religion—of whose benign inspiration these arts are the fruitage—to the realms of heathenism. The New Zealander has become a worshipper of Jesus. Australia is an evangelized empire. The dark continent of Africa has been laid open by the heroism of a Livingstone and a Stanley, and marts of business and schools and churches are springing up in its far interior. Science has been bringing to light new truths from the archives of nature, and deciphering old truths from the inscribed walls of Assyrian palaces and the tombs of Egyptian kings. Navigation and commerce have been revolutionized through the applications of steam. Oceans have been compressed into the dimensions of estuaries by the speed given to the modern ship. Railways, after spreading their iron net-work over the countries of the West, are stretching their lines eastward into India, China, and Japan.

The telegraph furnishes the daily paper with the news of yesterday from the farthest points of the earth. It conducts the negotiations of States, and sends the throb of joy or sorrow from heart to heart over leagues of intervening space. President Garfield dies, and in a few hours the sable emblazony of mourning hangs from the capitols of Europe and even of Asia. He is buried, and Queen Victoria orders flowers, which were blooming on their stems when her order was given, to be laid upon his bier. The man who had died forty years ago, if he should return to the world to-day, would hardly know the planet on which he had lived, or would be constrained to confess a power like that which divided the Red Sea and levelled the walls of Jericho has wrought this amazing metamorphosis.

And on the narrower platform of our own country a similarly eventful process has been going on. Our population has more than doubled itself since 1843. The war with Mexico gave to our government a territory on the Pacific slope which has grown into a splendid empire. The recent civil war has banished slavery from a cluster of States, and effected such an overthrow of the social, commercial, and political economy under which their inhabitants lived that the problem of existence, it may almost be said, has had to be wrought out by them afresh from new data and by new principles. Great cities, the nerve-centres of trade and speculation, have sprung up on Western plains where the prairie-grass once waved, or in mountain valleys where slumbered the undiscovered

coal and iron. Accumulations of wealth by the millions, which would in the days of our fathers have seemed impossible, are now an every-day phenomenon. A fleet of iron steamers from every shore in the world now daily enters our Atlantic ports. A summer excursion leads the tourist to the banks of the Nile, the Ganges, or the Jordan. Machinery ploughs our fields, sows our grain, and reaps our harvests. The magic wire flashes a vote in Congress from Washington to San Francisco, before the echo of the voices which gave it have died in the parliamentary hall, and wafts the last sigh of a dying mother in Maine to her son in Texas, before the lips which breathed it are cold. In flying hotels, driven by an invisible giant along pathways of steel, more men than Moses led through the Arabian desert are gliding every hour of the day or night with lightning speed over this American continent. The journey from New York to Natchez, which in my early days had to be made mostly in stage-coaches over the Alleghany mountains and in steamboats through the long windings of the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers, requiring two or three weeks and sometimes a month in the transit, can now be made in a little more than sixty hours.

And to come now to our own particular home in this community and this church, it is still an "eventful" history which we have to survey in the retrospect of the last forty years. Dividing that period into successive stages, I may say the first one, consisting of eighteen years, from 1843 to 1861, was characterized by a uniform and wholesome prosperity,—I say wholesome prosperity because, for a

series of years prior to this, the State of Mississippi had been the theatre of a remarkable *unwholesome* prosperity. Values of property and products had been swollen to an excessive magnitude; credit was asked and given to an insane degree; financial recklessness prevailed; the promises of individuals and corporations circulated as capital; until as a natural outgrowth of such infatuation a collapse ensued, and the country was prostrated by an almost universal bankruptcy. In this wrecked condition I found it at the commencement of my ministry. The church was affected in common with other interests by the decline in population and material resources which followed upon this commercial catastrophe. In 1844 its membership had been reduced, according to the report made to the General Assembly, to one hundred and ninety-three. Its contributions to Domestic and Foreign missions amounted to eleven hundred and eighty-three dollars, while in 1838 they had amounted to four thousand five hundred and sixty-two dollars. By slow degrees, however, both country and church rose again from this depression, and regained a normal condition of thrift and progress. In 1860 the membership reported was three hundred and sixty, and the contributions to Domestic and Foreign missions amounted to the sum of three thousand nine hundred and sixty-one dollars. In the same year there was reported as raised for special congregational purposes the sum of ten thousand six hundred and ninety-six dollars. During the year 1858 eighty-seven persons were admitted to the church on profession of

their faith. This bright period was brought to a close by the fearful conflict in which the Northern and Southern sections of the United States became involved, as the result of the heated political controversies which had long divided them. The issues of that conflict, direct and indirect, revolutionized the whole system of life under which this community had subsisted to an extent almost without a parallel in history. They can be likened only to the devastations of an earthquake. Property of untold value was swept from the hands of its possessors as by a magician's wand. A dynasty of men once lords of the soil, and exercising the authority of feudal barons in their domains,—many of them as princely in character as they were in estate,—has ceased to exist. Slavery has been abolished, and as a consequence domestic usages and methods of labor have been changed. The colored race have become sharers in the rights of citizenship, and were converted in a moment into a tremendous political power in the state. For a series of years the rigors of military rule, and the even worse disorders induced by the misrule of a mercenary provisional government, so blighted the energies and so obstructed the efforts of our people that every public interest languished, and a mortal paralysis seemed to have settled upon the body politic. The church during this dark period felt sadly the obscuration of this disastrous eclipse. Many of its constituents were obliged to change their residence and seek a livelihood in other sections of the country; it was reduced to a painful degree of impoverishment in its

resources, and what was perhaps worse, the pressure of worldly cares and the endless struggle with secular embarrassments, to a deplorable extent, threw the blight of a spiritual insensibility into the hearts of the people of God. In 1875 the reported number of communicants was two hundred and eighty-eight, of whom not more than two-thirds, probably, could have been called living or active members of the church. And the contributions for Domestic and Foreign missions for that year amounted to only one hundred and ninety-seven dollars.

A third era of a more auspicious character, I am permitted thankfully to announce, has within the last few years dawned upon our city and the contiguous country. Capital which had vanished from its old channels has reappeared in new ones, and is seeking new outlets for itself. Instead of the monuments of our former prosperity, which were to be found in a hundred palatial residences adorning our environs, we see the monuments of the prosperity of to-day in the towering smoke-stacks of our factories, in the arriving and departing trains of our railway, in the suburban boroughs which are linking themselves to the outskirts of our corporation, and in the scores of tasteful dwellings which every year is adding to the homes of our people, and in the increasing number and advanced grade of our institutions of learning. A spirit of hopefulness and enterprise has awakened like a strong man from his slumber, and has already attested its prowess in the bold achievements it has wrought, and is bracing itself we may trust for still more conspicuous efforts. And the

church, too, is catching something of the returning sunlight, and feeling something of the lift of the incoming tide. All along these clouded years to which I have been referring, there has been an inner circle of its members,—an elect band whom no tribulation or temptation could estrange from the service and kingdom of the Lord,—who, in the midst of abounding worldliness, have kept their garments unspotted and maintained a walk with God,—and who have ceased not to mourn over the desolations of Zion, and to stretch forth their hands to sustain her crumbling altars. They have stood by their pastor in all these times of discouragement, in keeping up the ordinances of worship and carrying on the various departments of the work of the church. As an evidence that some faithful souls still survived, I may mention that in the year 1876 a plain but commodious chapel was erected and dedicated on a lot purchased on St. Catherine Street, for the use of the population living on and contiguous to that important thoroughfare. A Sunday-school was opened, and regular weekly services have been held ever since,—conducted for the most part by one of the ruling elders of the church. This chapel, we have reason to believe, has endeared itself to those for whose benefit it was reared, and the Holy Spirit has deigned to bless its humble ministrations to the good of many of them.

At the present time many things indicate an awakened interest on the part of the congregation in the welfare of the church,—of which the anniversary exercises in which

we are now engaged may be taken as one. Perhaps these indications go even so far as to reveal, to some extent, that the healthful throbbing of the spiritual pulse of the church has recommenced. The ordinary attendance upon public worship is large and apparently increasing. The influx of population to our town has brought us some accession of valuable members. The Sunday-school instruction has been so blessed of God that a considerable number of those who have been under it have attached themselves to the communion of the church. During the year just closed twenty-four persons were added to our membership on profession of faith, and two on certificates from other churches. The present roll of members contains three hundred and twenty names. The contributions to Domestic and Foreign missions for the year have amounted to five hundred and sixty-one dollars and forty-five cents. The finances of the church have reached a condition which relieves its supervisors of the embarrassment under which for some years past they have been laboring. There are signs, too, that that miserable fallacy that the church as a whole—which is an abstract conception—can live and do its work while the individual members, who are its concrete components, are doing nothing,—is being discovered and dismissed. The conviction that each follower of Christ has some responsibility in carrying forward the work of his church, and that this work is to be effected as the aggregate result of the many separate efforts of the persons who constitute its membership, has been taking shape in

the minds and asserting itself in the action of our people. The question has been raised, can we not have a hive with no drones in it? In order to effect this result a plan of organization, which is designed to promote unity of feeling and to afford facilities for more efficient action in Christian work, has been adopted. Under this plan the whole body of communicants has been distributed into minor divisions, each of which has been placed under the leadership of suitable officers, and monthly meetings are appointed for the proposing and transacting of business. The plan is yet in its experimental stage, and can succeed only in so far as it finds hearts among Christ's professed followers who are willing to respond to His call for laborers in His vineyard. But, in so far as it has yet been tried, it has already proved itself capable of accomplishing important results. We are brought, it seems to me, my brethren, by these facts to a point in the history of this church in which the Saviour seems to be asking us to watch and to pray with Him with as much earnestness as He showed when He made the same request of His disciples in Gethsemane; and in which so much depends upon our fidelity to the trust He has committed to us,— that it may be said the enemies from whom He has to fear the most damage, are the slumberers who are to be found in the house of His friends. Material prosperity by itself does not constitute the prosperity of a community. You may build up your fabrics of industry and at the same time bring down the character of your men. You may spread out your threads of enterprise, and in their meshes

strangle the morals of your people. You may fill the air with the whir of machinery, and in the uproar drown the voice of God. Sodom stood as the metropolis of a territory so rich in resources that it could be likened to "the garden of the Lord," and yet the inhabitants of it became so corrupt that a storm of fire swept them from the earth. A higher authority than our treatises on political economy has declared that "Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people;" and in its ultimate outworkings the principle will be found to be as true as is the law of gravitation. In all our ambitious schemings it behooves us, therefore, to remember that righteousness is the fundamental condition and security of all the success we covet. The church must guard this sacred cornerstone, and every loyal member of the church ought to be found at his post ready to do his part of this duty. Religious faith, religious principle, and religious modes of life must be maintained, and to this end the concerted efforts of all Christian people should be directed to the support and multiplication of the institutions of religion, the protection of the Sabbath from desecration, the suppression of vicious customs, and the extirpation of the haunts of vice, the discouragement of illicit practices in trade, and the enforcement of civil and criminal law. Fraud, unchastity, drunkenness, and blood-shedding are as truly bars to the prosperity of a community as are cyclones and epidemics, and if the sins of luxury, sensuality, and sordid mammon-worship are to be the fruits of our prosperity, it may be found that our "children's teeth

have been set on edge" by the "sour grapes" their fathers have eaten.

The history of a community located as near the Southern seaboard as this city is, is liable to be made "eventful" by occasional visitations of those diseases which are indigenous to the tropics. And, accordingly, it has been my lot during the last forty years to pass through six seasons made memorable by the prevalence of the yellow fever. Considering our exposed position, it seems to me it ought to be recognized as another testimony to the kind superintendence of Providence that so few of these epidemic plagues within so long a period have been permitted to occur. In some of those which took place prior to 1869, during the first quarter-century of my pastorate, the mortality was appalling, and this church suffered the loss of many of its cherished members. Within the last fifteen years, with one exception, our city has been exempt from the assaults of the pestilence. In 1871, for more than two months, it prevailed among us, and carried a considerable number of victims to the grave. Only one of these was from our church communion. In 1878, when the whole Southwest seemed to be overshadowed by the death-laden cloud, this community was favored with an almost miraculous escape. Beleaguered with a circle of fire, like the bush which Moses saw, it remained unconsumed. Death reaped its precious harvests in other localities, but some sign, which we saw not, warned the destroyer from our doors. This deserves to be called our Passover summer. The best and most rigorous means

of protection were adopted and patiently carried out by our citizens, and in one view our deliverance may be ascribed to them. But, believing as I do, that God works through all the devices of human wisdom and makes them efficient, I am sure that an angel of mercy stood guard over us at every quarantine station, and that our escape was really due to the distinguishing goodness and the protecting power of the Lord our God. In this connection I may be pardoned for alluding to the remarkable exemption from disease which has been vouchsafed to me personally since I came among you. Few ministers, I imagine, have enjoyed more uniform health than I have, or have been able to devote as large a proportion of so long a period to their work as I have done. This endurance may be owing in a measure to the considerateness you have shown in remembering that mortal beings generally, and especially those who live under a constant strain of brain and heart, need occasionally a season of repose.

Among the events which are included in the ecclesiastical history of the last forty years, is one so singular, that had it been prognosticated at the time when I began my ministry, I should have pronounced it an impossibility. I refer to the sundering of the Presbyterian Church into its Northern and Southern sections, consequent upon the late war. When the political elements began to threaten the country with dismemberment, it was my hope and almost my conviction, as I know it was of many others, that the sacred cord of Christian brotherhood which held

this large denomination in union would be a cable strong enough to prevent the dissolution of the States. But the event occurred, and it has determined your relation as a church and mine as a minister to a different fold from that to which our fathers belonged. In all the commotions, the excitements, and even the errors to which this rupture may be traced we must believe the Lord was still leading His people; and it may be His will, by this new arrangement, to throw around important principles the necessary safeguards, and to lend increased momentum to the activities of His church. But that the animosities which are apt to survive these family separations, and to grow if not arrested into inveterate feuds, should, in such a case as this, be allayed, must be an issue to be devoutly desired by every Christian heart. And in order to this, the forms of speech and thought which stimulate these animosities, need to be, as far as possible, dropped from the use of the parties. The hand of the Lord has again been revealed in bringing about this issue. Within the last two years fraternal relationship and correspondence have been officially established between these two divided bodies, and I gratefully reflect upon the fact that I have been permitted at the close of my ministry to see the consummation of this event, and to behold among the phenomena of my setting sun, the rainbow of peace throwing its arch over the chasm which has so long kept apart the different branches of the one church under whose auspices I began my ministry.

It may be well, before I close these reminiscences, to

mention some of the practical details of my ministerial work, as illustrative of what is comprehended in a pastor's vocation. From my note-books I gather that I have delivered during my pastorate some six thousand sermons and lectures. Among these have been complete courses of study upon the "Life of our Lord," the "Life of St. Paul," the "Lives of the Patriarchs," the "Times of the Judges," the "History of the Kings of Judah and Israel," the "Exodus of the Israelites," the "Prophecies of Daniel," the "Book of Job," select portions of the "Book of Psalms" and the "Epistles," the "History of the Christian Church," and the contents of the "Westminster Shorter Catechism." I have in addition to these delivered numerous addresses to benevolent and literary associations. I have officiated at eight hundred and fifty-five funerals. Among these, in late years, was that of the venerable father in the Southwestern Church, the Rev. Benjamin Chase, D.D., who died October 11, 1870, and that of my life-long friend and co-laborer, the Rev. James Purviance, D.D., formerly pastor of the Carmel Church, and subsequently, from 1854 to 1860, president of Oakland College, who died July 14, 1871. There have been admitted to the church eight hundred and eleven communicants, of whom six hundred and fifteen were on profession of their faith. I have administered the rite of baptism to one hundred and thirty-two adult persons, and to seven hundred and ninety-two infants. I have united in marriage four hundred and nine couples. There has been contributed by this church, during my pastorate,

for religious and benevolent objects (exclusive of the ordinary support of the church organization) an aggregate of three hundred thousand dollars. I have in connection with my regular labors contributed somewhat largely to the literature of the religious press, and, besides several pamphlets, have published one volume entitled "Confessing Christ," to which I hope soon to add another, to be entitled "Following Christ,"—which two books I have prepared mainly as a legacy to my people. The phases of human life, and the scenes of joy and sorrow in the evolutions of human experience, which have passed before me in my intercourse with my fellow-men, would defy enumeration, and would be stranger than all the fictions which the poet or dramatist ever invented. And the result of all has been to impress me with the conviction that the state through which we are now passing is a mazy wilderness, in which an absolute faith in God can give us our only clue, and our only solace is to be found in the hope of another world where what is rudimental here will be perfected, and what is anomalous will be adjusted and made plain.

I claim the privilege of adding to this historical review a few reflections suggested by my position to-day.

First, I am teaching the same system of religion at the end of my ministry, which I taught at the beginning of it. It is the religion of the Bible,—a religion which claims to be true because the Bible is the Word of God, and which claims to give a right report of the sense of the Bible, because it is sustained in all its essential features

by the consenting testimony of all those churches which receive the Bible without addition or admixture as a rule of their faith. I read the Bible to-day precisely as I read it forty years ago, and the various forms of evidence by which it is proved to be God's book of religion are just as strong in my mind now as they were then. I found in that book the species of religion which satisfied both my intellect and my heart when I was first led to ask the question, what and where is religion? and I have clung to it ever since, as an infant clings to its mother's breast. And yet, in one respect, this religion of the Bible presents itself to my mind under a new aspect after the preaching of it for a lifetime. I have tested its applicability to the circumstances and needs of men. I have had an ample opportunity to understand these circumstances and needs, and I have found the religion of the Bible squaring with and fitting into them all. It is adjusted to the conditions and wants of the soul as light is to those of the eye. It suits man as the subject of those naturally pious instincts which constrain him to seek after a Divinity, and shows him a God worthy of his confidence and worship. It suits man as the possessor of a moral sense, and shows him a law which reveals perfectly to that sense, in broad distinction, the two territories of righteousness and unrighteousness. It suits man as a sinner, and shows him how forgiveness may be obtained without impairing the rectitude of God, or invading the immutability of His law. It suits man as a being liable to temptation, and shows him sources of supernatural succor. It suits man as an

infirm being, and shows him how, by spiritual aids, weakness may be converted into strength. It suits man as a mourner, and shows him springs of consolation in his deepest distresses. It suits man as a dying creature, and shows him a pathway to eternal life through the darkness of the grave. It suits man at every season of life, in every possible relation, under all conceivable contingencies, and shows him in them all the exact way in which he may walk most wisely and securely. If anything better than this religion, as the converter, the reformer, the benefactor, and the sanctifier of man, has been introduced into the world, I have never seen or heard of it. Of one thing I am sure, if this religion has not been able to convert, to reform, to bless, and to sanctify those who have been listening to the exposition of it for forty years, nothing else which could possibly be brought to them under the name of religion can be expected to do it. Where the sunbeam from the heavens has failed to penetrate a darkened chamber, I am sure the lesser lights which men have kindled, electric though they may be, will fail still more signally. Therefore, my brethren, this gospel of the grace of God which I have preached to you in the past, I expect to preach to you to the end, and with the observations of forty years behind me, I am, like St. Paul, only the more "determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and Him crucified."

Second, I am more than ever satisfied of the certainty of the progressive prevalence and final triumph of the religion of the Bible. Opposition to that religion has

taken new forms, and assumed a peculiarly bold front within my recollection. A microscopic criticism, failing to make the grand generalization which sees in the whole Bible a unity of design and an orderly consistency which entitle it to credence, is occupying itself with the minute study of words and phrases, and drawing from their ambiguities or incompatibilities conclusions adverse to the authenticity of the Holy Book. This is like the insect pronouncing St. Paul's cathedral an abortion because its tiny feet have stumbled over a rough spot within the majestic dome. Materialists would take away from us our God because they tell us we can know only facts, and facts are natural not supernatural things. In this drift of science towards the ultimate authority of facts, I think I see the movement of a forerunner preparing unwittingly the way for the enthronement of the religion of the Bible. This principle of the materialist, that belief must rest on facts, is the very one upon which the Bible has always laid claim to the belief of men. Only, the Bible is more accurate than the materialist, and admits that there are facts which the senses do not take cognizance of. Science, in following the train of facts which it can see and handle, reaches, sooner or later, in every direction a point or line where it needs for the solution of its problems some fact which it cannot see or handle. It comes to the border of a chasm where something ought to be, and where it can find nothing. The Bible does not contradict science, but speaks in exact harmony with it when it lifts its voice over the chasm and cries, "In the beginning God created

the heavens and the earth." In leading men to build their faith on facts, materialists are opening the very track by which they must be led ultimately to accept the Bible as a revelation of truth. The Bible is itself a fact, the existence of which in our world, and the contents of which call for notice and explanation, in the face of all that science may say to its discredit. Jesus Christ is a fact, and the existence of the church which bears His name, and the extraordinary history of that church are facts, and these all deserve study. The phenomena of conscience, and the religious intuitions and workings of the soul, are facts which no thoroughly scientific mind can overlook. It is just because men will not regard the facts by which they are environed, and by which their destiny is to be determined, that they do not become believers in the Bible. Let the apostles of science push forward their discoveries, and lay bare as widely as they can the domain of facts. I am sure that in doing so they are only making ready the field for the mission of the apostles of Christ.

Third, it appears to me that just here where we live, and just at this epoch, there is a special reason why all Christians—and I may, as your pastor, lay the obligation particularly upon you, my brethren of this church—should make the type of their religion so legible that the excellency of it may be "known and read of all men." We have become in the progress of the years a heterogeneous population. Representatives of the creeds, the polities, the rituals, the forms of thought, the virtues and the vices

of various races and nationalities are gathered here upon this narrow platform. All have a right to be here, and all are covered by the ægis of our tolerant and liberal constitution. We meet as neighbors, as associates in business, and as visitors at our respective homes. How necessary, in this crowd of observers, and in this throng of competing claimants of the true religion, that we,—to limit my remark to the members of my own flock,—that *we* should make such an exhibition of religion after our Presbyterian model, that, by its manifest superiority as a power to make men Christ-like and image-bearers of God, in purity, in uprightness, and in charity, it may lead others, whom we suppose to be in error, to adopt our better system of faith and life.

Fourth, I would urge upon the present membership of the church the duty of handing down to a future generation the ideas of Christian doctrine and of Christian living, of loyalty to truth and consecration to God, which have characterized its membership in the former stages of its history. The homes of our fathers, in which the thought of God mingled with every event in the family history, in which the domestic altar stood by every fireside, and the blessed Saviour was an ever-present inmate, where are they? The future lies in the hands of the present, and we, who are the inheritors of blessings transmitted to us by the pious ancestors of forty years ago, are bound to see that those blessings shall be conveyed unimpaired to the generation who shall occupy these seats forty years hence.

And, lastly, I would be reminded myself and remind you, that it is a journey through a wilderness which we are all now prosecuting. There is no resting, no finality, in our present sphere. We are a caravan, not a settled community. The value of everything to which we can here turn our hands lies in something beyond. We are travelling through arid tracts where no water is, and through dreary solitudes where no sunbeam reaches us. We pitch our tents each day at a new encampment. Each night's repose is to freshen us for the morrow's toil. The hot breath of the simoom or the wild blast of the sirocco threaten us each moment with insidious or violent destruction. Oh, happy they who have a better country in view! If you have no Canaan in your eye, my friends, I pity you. You are aimless wanderers in a desert, entitled to no higher respect than the birds of the air, or the beasts of the field. Oh, let us beware of the folly of those unbelieving Israelites, who, through a base rejection of the terms upon which the prize was offered to them, failed to enter into the promised rest! We shall never observe together a festival like this. Our earthly anniversaries will soon end, and the years of time melt into the solemn eternity. The partings of the past will be repeated in the future, and to the generation who shall worship in these courts forty years hence most of us will be the forgotten ones, as the worshippers of forty years ago are to us to-day. Beloved, from these abodes of sin and sorrow and death, let us resolutely set our faces, and prosecute our march towards the realms of light!

Let us cling to the footprints of those who through faith and patience have already inherited the promises! Let us follow the leadings of the Lord our God through the intricacies of this mortal stage, that when we shall have left it we may all meet,—beyond the Jordan,—where the pain and the weariness of the pilgrimage shall be eternally forgotten in "the rest that remains for the people of God!"

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